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THE CHARACTER OF A MINISTER OF THE GOSPEL AS A TEACHER AND PATTERN.

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SERMON

PREACHED BEFORE

THE SYNOD OF ABERDEEN,

AT ABERDEEN APRIL 7, 1752.

BY

GEORGE CAMPBELL M. A.

MINISTER AT BANCHORY TERNAN.

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ABERDEEN:

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AS A

TEACHER AND PASTOR.

THE CHARACTER OF A MINISTER, AS A TEACHER AND PATTERN.

MATTHEW V.

13. *Ye are the ſalt of the earth.*——
14. *Ye are the light of the world.*——

AS on an occaſion of this nature it is expected, and is no doubt proper, that ſome reflections be offered from the pulpit relating to the *miniſterial* character and function, I have made choice of theſe words as a ſuitable foundation for a diſcourſe on this ſubject. At the ſame time I cannot but acknowledge it is with reluctance I enter upon ſo unequal a taſk I am perfectly ſenſible of the diſadvantages under which I labour, appearing in this place in the quality of an *inſtructor* to many, whom it were much more fitting that with humility and attention, I ſhould receive inſtruction from. *I ſaid, Days ſhould ſpeak, and multitude of years ſhould teach wiſdom.* But the appointment of my ſuperiors, which 'tis my duty to regard as ſacred, lays me under a neceſſity that of itſelf ſuperſedes all other apology. I ſhall therefore confiding in the candor of the audience, beg leave humbly and briefly to ſuggeſt thoſe things, ſuch as they are,

which have occurr'd to my thoughts on this important ſubject. The *theme* is certainly in *itſelf momentous*; and to *miniſters* 'tis peculiarly *intereſting*: it therefore well deſerves our ſtricteſt *attention*. As to the *juſtneſs* or *importance* of the reflections now to be advanced, that is entirely ſubmitted to the better diſcernment of my reverend fathers and brethren, to whom at preſent I principally addreſs myſelf. *I ſpeak as to wiſe men, judge ye what I ſay.*

To begin then, the words in queſtion are a portion of that admirable diſcourſe of our Saviour, which is commonly called his *ſermon on the mount*; wherein we have a moſt excellent abſtract of *chriſtian ethics*, painted out after the oriental manner in the ſtrongeſt and livelieſt *metaphors*, illuſtrated by the moſt familiar but appoſite *examples*, and inforced by the moſt nervous and affecting *motives*. As to the *paſſage* itſelf now read in your hearing, it doth not appear material, whether we ought to conſider it, according to the ſenſe of ſome interpreters, as directed by our Lord to all his hearers alike under the notion of *diſciples* and followers; or whether, as others imagine, he here addreſſeth himſelf in a peculiar manner to thoſe whom he conſtituted his *apoſtles*, and afterwards appointed to be the publiſhers and teachers of his religion throughout the world. Doubtleſs whatever may in this reſpect be advanc'd with juſtice concerning all *chriſtians* indiſcriminately, when compar'd with *infidels*, may more eminently be affirm'd of thoſe, whoſe particular province it is to be the *guides* and monitors of the reſt, when view'd in compariſon with ſuch as

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are under their inſpection and care. And this is intirely conformable to ſcripture ſtile. * *The chriſtians* of *Philippi* are ſaid by the apoſtle Paul to *ſhine* among their *Pagan* neighbours as ‡ *lights in the world*, an expreſſion which commonly denotes the *heavenly bodies*, ſimilar to which is the appellation in the apocalypſe given to the *angels* the miniſters or overſeers *of the ſeven Aſiatic churches*, who are there denominated ‖ *the ſeven ſtars* by which theſe congregations were illuminated. This remark may ſufficiently vindicate the application we make of the text in viewing it as directed to thoſe who are the eſtabliſht teachers of religion, the *miniſters* of the goſpel.

To them may we ſuppoſe our divine maſter peculiarly addreſſing himſelf in thoſe emphatical terms we have read to you: *Ye are the ſalt of the earth. Ye are the light of the world.* 'As for you my apoſtles,' as if he had ſaid, 'tis your particular province by your 'example eſpecially, to inſinuate into the hearts of my 'people the love of *virtue* and true piety, and thus 'effectually to cruſh the ſeeds, and check the pro'greſs of vice and immorality. What *ſalt* is in the 'material creation, ſuch are *ye* in the *moral* and *ſpiri*'tual; it being the principal intent of both to pre'ſerve the world from corruption. 'Tis moreover 'your province by *public teaching* and otherwiſe to 'furniſh the minds of chriſtians with all neceſſary 'and uſeful *knowledge*. Ye are by profeſſion the *lu*'minaries of my church, the *channels* thro' which the 'heavenly ſcience muſt be conveyed to others. What

* Ph. ii. 15. ‡ φωστῆρες ‖ Rev. i. 20.

'light

'*light* is to the corporeal *eye*, ſuch muſt *your doctrine*
'be to the *underſtanding*, the eye of the ſoul. 'Tis
'ſolely by the light that men can perceive either whi-
'ther they are going, or how to direct their courſe,
'and walk with ſafety.'

FROM the words thus explained, we intend, my brethren, in the enſuing diſcourſe, to offer with divine aſſiſtance, ſome reflections upon each of theſe branches of the miniſterial character, *public teaching* and *private life*. Theſe for connections ſake we ſhall purſue in the order we have now propos'd them, tho' different from that in which they lie before us in the *text*. And in doing this, I ſhall take the liberty to forget, if I may ſo expreſs myſelf, that they are my *ſeniors* moſtly to whom I ſpeak, and ſhall adduce whatever the ſubject itſelf abſtractly conſidered, ſeems to require.

WE are firſt then to conſider the miniſter of the goſpel as *a public teacher*: and 'tis principally in reference to this part of the ſacred character that thoſe veſted with it are ſtiled *the light of the world*. There is my brethren ſuch a cloſe and evident analogy between *light* and *knowledge*, that in all known languages, ancient and modern, the former of theſe terms hath been adopted as an obvious and expreſſive metaphor, by which to denote the latter. And indeed ſo exactly parallel, are their reſpective *natures*, *uſes* and *effects*, that it is impoſſible the various qualities of the one ſhould in brighter and more glowing colours be delineated, than by thoſe of the other. Thus tho' *both* are *pleaſant* in poſſeſſion, *each* is obviouſly intend-

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ed for a *further* end. *Light* is not more neceſſary for the ſafe, eaſy and due performance of *natural* and *animal* actions, than *knowledge* for directing our conduct as *rational* and *moral* agents. In like manner *either* of them is equally liable to *abuſe*; for altho' *each* reſpectively *indicates* the road, neither can *compel* us to walk in it. On the contrary, as *both* are of ſignal *advantage* to the *virtuous* and well-diſpoſed, and enable ſuch to be incomparably more beneficial to mankind; ſo alſo when enjoyed by the *wicked* and profligate, they render them infinitely more *pernicious*. By the aſſiſtance of the *light*, and by means of a more extenſive *knowledge*, a man is often capacitated for contriving and executing blacker and deeper miſchief than could have been perpetrated by the *blind* and *ignorant*: nevertheleſs *both* in the main, eſpecially *knowledge* ought indubitably to be conſidered, as much more favourable to *right* practice than to *wrong*, as by nature far leſs friendly to *vice* than *virtue*. For thereby we are in a capacity of diſcovering the *manifold* conſequences of human actions, both the *nearer* and the more *remote*, which when preſent to the underſtanding prove generally a potent *curb* to vicious diſpoſitions, and no inconſiderable *ſpur* to virtue.

MOST certain it is, that as chiefly by a capacity for acquiring knowledge, man is rais'd above the level of the brute-creation, ſo this acquiſition is indiſpenſibly neceſſary leſs or more in every ſituation whatſoever. *Knowledge* is truly the *ground-work* of every moral and ſpiritual attainment. The obligations of no one ſtation in ſociety can be diſcharged without it. Every art, every occupation within the compaſs

of

of human life is founded on it. And with regard to matters of religion, how *superſtitious* muſt our worſhip unqueſtionably be, if with the *Athenians* we direct it to an *unknown God?* What are we *better'd* by the goſpel, if *ignorant* of it? How ſhall we in that caſe give *faith* to its *doctrines*, or *obedience* to its *precepts?* Where the *allurement* of its *promiſes*, where the *terror* of its *threatnings*, if unknown? Nay ſo *eſſential*, ſo fundamental a thing is *knowledge* to religion, that by an uſual figure 'tis often in ſcripture ſubſtituted for it. ¶ *This is life eternal, that they might know thee, the only true God, and Jeſus Chriſt whom thou haſt ſent.*

Now brethren, 'tis by *teaching* that knowledge, the faireſt offspring of eternal wiſdom is communicated to *mortals*, that her celeſtial *beams* are *darted* into the *minds* of men. And as this is a *branch*, and indeed a very eminent branch of the paſtoral office, well may the *miniſter* of Jeſus be on this account denominated the *luminary*, or in divine things the *oracle* of his charge. * *The prieſts lips*, ſaith God by the prophet *Malachi*, *ſhould keep knowledge, and they ſhould ſeek the law at his mouth.* What relation *the eye* in the human body (which † our Saviour aptly terms the *light* or lamp *of the body*) bears to all the other members, ſuch bears the chriſtian *paſtor* to thoſe intruſted to his care. 'Tis then above all things neceſſary that he himſelf be amply furniſhed with this heavenly treaſure: for *if the eye be viciated*, if this lamp be dimmed or totally extinguiſhed, *the whole body will be*

¶ Jo. xvii. 3. * Mal. ii. 7. † Mat. vi. 22. 23.

in

involv'd in darkneſs. If therefore, ſubjoins our Lord, *even the light which is in thee be darkneſs*, * *how great muſt the darkneſs itſelf be?* How complete muſt be the darkneſs of the body, which is naturally and originally dark, and from this fountain the eye, derives all the light it hath? If you the inſtructors of the world (to carry on the ſimile) be yourſelves *ignorant*, how *groſs* muſt be the *ignorance* of the *people*, thoſe who receive all their knowledge, all their inſtruction from you? *If the blind lead the blind, both muſt* inevitably *fall into the ditch.*

BUT enough of the *dignity* and *neceſſity* of this qualification, that being a matter univerſally acknowledged, let us next conſider more particularly *what ſort* of knowledge that is with which the miniſterial office is concerned, and *in what manner* beſt *communicated*, ſo as to become ſerviceable to others.

As to the firſt of theſe inquiries I would obſerve, that this knowledge is of all others the moſt *ſublime* in its *nature*, the moſt *important* in its *conſequences*. As to its *nature*, brethren, 'tis aſſuredly no ignoble theme whereof we treat; 'tis no leſs than, The being, the attributes, the tranſactions, the deſigns, the laws of the all-perfect GOD the ſupreme, the only potentate of heaven and earth, the creator, the preſerver, the governor of the univerſe. As to its *importance* to men, of what boundleſs extent, how immenſely comprehenſive muſt it be, ſince by it we learn all that concerns either our *preſent* tranquillity, or *eternal* happineſs.

* τὸ σκότος πόσον;

AND if ſo, it muſt be of the laſt moment undeniably that this nobleſt ſcience be tranſmitted pure and entire, no way mutilated or diſtorted in its members, ſo as to diminiſh its exquiſite ſymmetry, abſolutely free from every thing ſuppoſititious and apocryphal, from all interpolations of human invention and conceit. This ought ſo much the more carefully to be obſerved, as 'tis confeſt on all hands that this doctrine is in a *ſupernatural* way deriv'd to us from divine revelation, and that it would have been impracticable for the *natural* unaſſiſted powers of man ever to have attained ſuch lofty grand diſcoveries. * *The things of God*, the myſteries or ſecrets of heaven, *knoweth none but the ſpirit of God*, and they only of *Adam*'s race to whom the ſpirit, and preciſely as far as the ſpirit hath been pleaſed to reveal them.

YET ſuch hath been the preſumption of weak ſhortſighted mortals, that under both œconomies the *Moſaic* and the chriſtian, and in all ages of the world, there hath appeared a wonderful propenſity to intermingle with *divine truths* the *fictions* of the *human* brain. And to this eſpecially 'tis owing, and to the many miſinterpretations it occaſions, that the native ſimplicity, the majeſty and beauty of the goſpel have been thro' ſucceſſive centuries, and in different nations, ſo much impair'd, its luſtre ſullied, its force enervated, its aim diverted, and an inexhauſtible fund of noiſe and altercation introduced.

IT was this aſſuming diſpoſition in the *Jewiſh* doctors, the firſt refiners upon religious principles, and

* 1 Co. ii. 11.

inventors

inventors of a diſputatious or ſchool-theology, it was in them this aſſuming diſpoſition which extorted from our Saviour, tho' a perfect model of meekneſs and lenity, ſuch cutting, but deſerved reproaches, that * *they taught for doctrines the commandments of men*, that *by their traditions they had rendered the commandment of God of none effect*, that by their † fantaſtic gloſſes, ſophiſtical expoſitions ‡ vicarious performances and ‖ caſuiſtic refinements, meer illuſions all, they had preſumptuouſly abrogated the divine law. For as the luxuriancy of the weeds greatly impoveriſhes the grain, ſo in religion if once *frivolous* dogmas or *indifferent* practices are introduced, obtruded and valued as *important* and *neceſſary*, ſuch as are really *important* and *neceſſary*, will be regarded as *frivolous* and *indifferent*. When the attention of men is fixt upon idle *pageantry* and *rareeſhow*, *the baptiſms of cups and platters*, and the like endleſs and uſeleſs ceremonial *purgations* and *conſecrations*, ¶ ſuch *trifles* will quickly diſpoſſeſs *juſtice*, *mercy*, *veracity*, *the love of God* and *honour of parents*, of that *ſupreme regard* which is their indiſputable *birthright*: an obſtinate *adherence* to the moſt *inſignificant*, *incomprehenſible* or even *contradictory* tenets, (for the more *abſurd* the *doctrine*, the more *meritorious* the *faith*) a punctual *obſervance* of rites and mummeries, the *ſilliеſt* and *wretchedeſt* that ever diſgraced humanity, will tacitly for certain, if not avowedly, be

* Mat. xx. 6, 9. † Mat. v. throughout. ‡ Mark vii. 9, &c. ‖ For their ingenious caſuiſtry concerning oaths, ſee Mat. xxiii. 16 &c. ¶ Mat. xxiii. 14, 23, 25, &c.

deemed a full *expiation* of *insincerity*, *villainy*, *inhumanity*, *oppression*, and an abundant *compensation* for all the *moral virtues*. That this was actually the case with numbers in the *Judaic* church, especially with those **strict* people, as they modestly term'd themselves, those dogmatical, hypocritical religionists the *Pharisees*, the whole gospel history fully demonstrates almost in every page.

AND 'tis precisely the same danger in the *christian* church of which *Paul* warns the *Colossians*, ‖ *Beware lest any man spoil you thro' philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ.* Not as if true *philosophy*, which is nothing else but the knowledge of the laws of nature, that is the order establish'd in the universe by infinite wisdom, can ever be *hurtful* to the interests of *religion*, which claims the *same* origin and author. By no means. Only our apostle thinks not himself interested to *dispute* with those *sophists* he alludes to, a *title* they were pleas'd however unjustly to assume; but to *caution* the *christians* to whom he is writing, to be on their guard against a *doctrine*, which might be exhibited to them under the plausible name of *philosophy*, but which in reality, whatever it pretended to be, was *vain deceit*. And indeed never hath *delusion* prov'd more *successful*, than when disguis'd under the specious garb of *human wisdom*; as it hath almost always in religious matters assum'd that dress. And no wonder; for when the *plain* tenets of christianity are *transfigur'd*, rather should I say *disfigur'd*,

* Acts xxvi. 5. ‖ Col. ii. 8.

and

and preſented in a habit *foreign* and *unnatural*, 'tis eaſier far, to warp into *ſchemes* thus *artificially* compiled, the *idols* of an exuberant ungoverned *fancy*, the favourite dogmas of the author. The celebrated *hiſtorian* of the *council of Trent*, after enumerating the *deciſions* of that *SYNOD* concerning *juſtification*, which they had refin'd upon with indefatigable labour, and caſt entirely into the *ſcholaſtic* mold, that ſo it might the better tally with their *ſyſtems*, adds this ſevere, but pertinent reflection. * "Of all theſe "curious *determinations*," ſays he, "the greateſt "ſhare of the *merit* inconteſtably belongs to *ARI-*"*STOTLE*, who had in his *analytics* accurately "diſtinguiſhed the various kinds of *cauſes*, which," this writer ſhrewdly ſuggeſts, "if that famous *heath-*"*en philoſopher* had not ſettled, we *chriſtians* alas! "had at this day remained *ignorant* of many impor-"tant *articles* of *faith*." A bitter ſarcaſm indeed, but juſt; and it were to be wiſh'd, that this *aſſembly* had been the *only chriſtian* teachers, againſt whom it could have been with ſucceſs levelled.

CHRISTIANITY, my brethren, hath gained nothing by ſuch *adventitious* helps. On the contrary, they have afforded a *handle* for the ſuperinduction of many *erroneous* and *abſurd* opinions, and for an infinity of *rents* and *factions*, *heats* and *animoſities* in the *chriſtian* community. On the *foundation* of the *goſpel*, men naturally enamor'd of their own productions, have but too generally built *wood*, *hay*, *ſtubble*, have ſpider-like reared up *deceitful flimſy* fabrics of *their own*, which

* Fra. Paolo. Lib. II Seſſ. VI.

never

never will endure the *trial*; and even in matters where the light of *revelation* ſhone too bright to be *totally* eclips'd, how has the *truth* been *obſcured* and embaraſt, ſeen, I may ſay, by refraction thro' the *impure* fallacious *medium* of unmeaning diſtinctions, intricate quibbles, ſophiſtic diſquiſitions, and I know not what impenetrable *clouds* of *metaphyſic* duſt, which hath been rais'd on every hand by the contending parties. In ſuch like *diſputes*, when examin'd with accuracy, one ſhall frequently diſcover, either that the adverſe *poſitions* of the combatants are at bottom abſolutely *unintelligible*, and have no meaning at all, or ſecondly, that the *difference*, where there is a meaning, is not *real* but *verbal*, each ſide having eſpouſed a *peculiar* ſet of *phraſes*, whereof they are inflexibly tenacious (*both* which are properly call'd *logomachies*, meer contentions about words) or laſtly, that the *debate* regards ſome *abſtruſe* point, upon which *ſcripture* hath been altogether *ſilent*; and which over and above is as far *beyond* the reach of human *reaſon*, as *remote* from any influence upon human *life*. Now all theſe *kinds* of diſputation, how can we more accurately *define*, than in the apoſtle's words to *Timothy* * *VAIN BABBLINGS, and oppoſitions of ſcience, falſly ſo called.*

BUT that we may be ſatisfied that ſuch fine-ſpun *airy* theories, ſuch *profound* reſearches (which, to ſay the leaſt, far exceed the comprehenſion of the vulgar, are quite *extraneous* to religion, let us impartially conſider, and ſeriouſly ask ourſelves, 'Was our *religion*,

* 1 Tim. vi. 20.

'as

'as an invaluable *ſecret*, diſcloſed only to *contemplative* and *learned* heads? Was it ſolely imparted to 'the *inquiſitive* and *philoſophic few*, thoſe *ſelect* ſpirits, 'who to the advantage of *acuter* intellects, have obtained the additional improvements of a *refin'd education*?——— or, Was this goſpel promulgated 'to *the many*, the groſs of mankind, nay particularly 'to ¶ *the poor*, ‡ *the weak*, *the ignorant*, and comparatively, *the fooliſh things of the world*? Was it 'calculated to afford topics of *nice* and *abſtract* diſcuſſion, a choice *ſpeculative* entertainment to idle 'theoriſts in the *cloſet*?——— or, Was it intended 'to ſerve as the moſt efficacious *incitement* to *piety* and *virtue*, thro' all the different *ſtages*, and in all 'the various *ſtations* of human *life*? Was it to *amuſe*?—— or, *to edify*? to occupy the *head*? ——— or, to humanize the *heart*? Was it to 'kindle *charity*, that *heaven-deſcended* fire?——— or, 'to inflame the *fury* of *controvertiſts*?' Let us bring the matter to the apoſtle's *teſt*, 'Doth ſuch a *philoſophical* ſubtilty * *miniſter to godly edifying*? Doth it 'promote in us a *godlike* temper, or excite us to the 'practice of any one *duty*?——— or on the contrary, Doth it only *miniſter queſtions*, † *gender ſtrifes* 'and ſupply materials for the invenom'd *tongues* and 'pens of diſputants? Is it of that *ſort* of knowlege, 'which improves the *life* and *manners*?——— or, 'which *puffeth up*, and maketh men ‖ *dote about que-* 'ſtions and wars of words, whereof cometh envy, ſtrife,

¶ Mat. xi. 5. ‡ 1 Cor. i. 27, 28. * 1 Tim. i. 4.
† 2 Tim. ii. 23. ‖ 1 Tim. vi. 4, 5.

'railings,

'*railings, evil ſurmiſings, perverſe diſputings of men of* '*corrupt minds*,' or (as theſe laſt words more ſtrictly interpreted imply) ‡ 'janglings of men viciated in un-'derſtanding?' Upon the whole, *here* muſt we *reſt* as in the only *ſafe concluſions*. To *theſe* we are going to mention, muſt we ever have *recourſe*, as the ſureſt *touchſtone*, approv'd alike by *ſcripture* and by *common ſenſe*. If the *truths* of the *goſpel* were intended for the *inſtruction* of ALL mankind, and if *unerring* wiſdom knows to *proportion* the *means* to the *end*; they are doubtleſs *level* to the *capacity* of ALL.—If they were deſigned not for the *amuſement*, but the REFORMATION of the world; they muſt infallibly have a PRACTICAL tendency, and ſerve either as a *directory* in right behaviour, or as *incentives* mediately or immediately to it.

SUCH, to wit *plain* and *practical*, the genuine uncorrupted *truths* of *chriſtianity* will be found to be. They are in reality neither *many* nor *complicated*, being a ſimple detail of the moſt important *facts*, which when duly weighed, ſerve to awaken us to a ſenſe of the *ineffable moment* of human *life*; and imprint in *indelible* characters upon the *hearts* of the attentive; that our ALL for *time* and for *eternity* depends upon our *conduct*. Thence we learn, '*That* 'there is *one* only *GOD*, a *ſpirit*, *eternal* and *omni-*'*preſent*, infinitely *powerful*, *wiſe* and *good*, the *maker* 'and the *ruler* of the world:——*That man* having '*apoſtatiz'd* from him, and ſo become obnoxious to 'perdition, it pleas'd the *univerſal Lord*, for our *re-*

‡ παραλιατριβαὶ διεφθαρμένων ἀνθρώπων τὸν νῦν.

'covery

'*covery*, to ſend into the world his ONLY SON:
'— *That* this glorious *perſonage* aſſum'd *our* nature,
'was *born* of a *virgin*, and ſo uſher'd into theſe ter-
'reſtrial abodes in a way ſuitable to the dignity of
'his ſource:——*That* he *reveal'd* the will of heaven
'to man, was by profeſſion a *preacher* of righteouſ-
'neſs, of which in his life he exhibited a *perfect pat-*
'*tern*:——— *That* under the *form* of civil *juſtice*,
'he *ſuffered* a moſt unjuſt, cruel and ignominious
'*death*:——— *That* he *roſe again* the third day, an
'irrefragable evidence of his miſſion: ——— *That*
'he afterwards *aſcended* into heaven: ——— *That* by
'the *merit* of his obedience and ſuffering, he *purchaſ-*
'*ed* for his people *eternal felicity*: ——— *That* this
'purchaſe is aſcertained to all who *repent* and *obey*
'the goſpel, and *offer'd* on theſe *terms*: ——— *That*
'to *aſſiſt* in performing this *condition*, the *grace* of the
'HOLY SPIRIT of God is *tender'd* to every one,
'who ſincerely and aſſiduouſly ſeeks it:——— *That*
'there is an appointed time of general *reſurrection*,
'when all the *dead* whereſoever ſcatter'd, ſhall ariſe:
'——— *That* thereafter comes the *final judgment*,
'when every individual ſhall be judged by Jeſus the
'Son of God, according to the *actions* done in the
'body, whether *good* or *bad*:——— *That* finally in
'conſequence of the irrevocable ſentence, which will
'be then pronounced, *the wicked ſhall go into ever-*
'*laſting puniſhment, and the righteous into life eternal*,
'the two laſt ſtates of retribution.' A ſtupendous
plan of *providence* concerning *man*, of the moſt *exalted*
nature, of the moſt *laſting* and *extenſive* conſequences
is *here* diſplayed, as ſtill *carrying* into *execution*. *Simple*

and *eaſy* are the truths unfolded in it, at the ſame time *awful* and *majeſtic*. *Nothing* of a *jejune* or *futile* nature, no ſubject of *uſeleſs*, *frigid*, *dry* diſcuſſion.

IT cannot however be diſſembled, that upon *this*, as on every other ſubject, people of an *over-curious* temper may ſtart *innumerable* topics of *fruitleſs* inquiry, eſpecially concerning the *manner*, wherein the ſeveral parts of this *auguſt ſcheme*, have been, are, or will be *accompliſhed*. But as in *divine* things, wherever God hath not expreſly *reveal'd* himſelf, we cannot pretend to *knowledge*, ſo we ought not to profeſs *belief*; and 'tis a daring *frenzy* to attempt to *explore*, what *infinite* wiſdom hath ſeen fit to *veil*. * *Secret things belong to the Lord our God, but thoſe which are revealed, belong to us and to our children for ever*. Yet *vain man would be wiſe* (would he purſu'd it in a *wiſer manner!*) nay to *this* moment ſo *prevalent* in him is the *appetite* for *forbidden* knowledge, that the very *arcana* of heaven, he will with matchleſs temerity be trying every method to *inveſtigate*, even tho' the *fields* of ſcience aſſign'd him as his proper portion ſhould lie *barren* and *uncultivated*. How *extravagant*, how *ridiculous* his conduct! Not more *extravagant*, more *ridiculous*, or more *impotent* would our *efforts* be, to *overtop* the *ſize* which *nature* hath preſcribed the human *make*, and to graſp the *planets* with our hands, than thus to arrive by dint of human *reaſon*, at what the ſovereign *diſpoſer* of all things hath placed beyond the limits of human *faculties*.

* Deut. xxix. 29.

AND

AND truly as we have no ſufficient *data* for the ſolution of ſuch recondite aërial *problems*, ſo neither is *religion* at all *concerned* in them, which was never intended to gratify our *curioſity*, but to regulate our *lives*. To exemplify this in a few ſimilar *inſtances* taken from common life; The *huſbandman*, in order to be fitted for his buſineſs, had need to diſtinguiſh the proper *ſeaſons* of ſowing and reaping, to underſtand the *ſoil*, and the neceſſary *preparation* of it, to diſcern the ſufficiency of the *grain*, and to know the manner of *committing* it to the ground. But is he one whit leſs fit, altho' he know not that the plant is contained in *embryo* in the ſeed, tho' he form no conception by what ſecret *canals*, the proper juices are extracted from the earth, how the *manure* is converted into food, or apprehend not aught of the marvellous *proceſs* of vegetation? In like manner 'tis enough to induce one to ſupport himſelf by *meat*, that he knows 'tis neceſſary for *nouriſhment*, that he is ſtimulated by *hunger*, and able to diſtinguiſh ſalutary *food* from poiſon, or from what is noxious and unfit: but there is no neceſſity that he underſtand the *anatomy* of the human body, the manner wherein *digeſtion* is perform'd by the ſtomach, or know the internal *apparatus* for the ſecretion of the chyle. Now to *apply* theſe examples to the matter in hand, 'tis of the utmoſt *utility* ſurely in order to awake our *attention*, and make us ponder every ſtep of our conduct, that we believe the *reſurrection* and *judgment* ſubſequent upon it; but it makes no odds at all, it alters not in the leaſt the import of the matter, and therefore is a point of meer *curioſity*, to inquire *how the dead are raiſed*, and *with what* particu-

lar *body they come?* If riſe we *muſt*, and give account of ourſelves to God, 'tis all one to us, whatever be the *manner* in which omnipotence will effectuate this amazing change. The ſame might be illuſtrated in numberleſs other inſtances, but we forbear.

WE now proceed to conſider *how* this divine knowledge we have been characterizing, is beſt *communicated*, ſo as to become ſerviceable to others. And upon this head, we ſhall ſatisfy ourſelves with a brief enumeration of ſuch particulars, as ſeem moſt worthy of our notice; it being impoſſible to mention every thing.

FIRST then we ought to exhibit the doctrines of religion *pure* and *unmixt*. This is what the apoſtle *Peter* calls * *the ſincere*, the unadulterated *milk of the word*. If we would *retain the form of ſound words*, as † recommended and taught by the inſpir'd inſtructor of the gentiles; the peculiar *tenets* of *chriſtianity* muſt be delivered in their own beautiful *ſimplicity* ‡ *not in the words which man's wiſdom teacheth*, not in the learned *jargon* of the ſchools; but, in imitation of that great apoſtle, in the words, as much as poſſible, *which the Holy Ghoſt* himſelf, who hath revealed them, *teacheth*, in the expreſſive, elegant plainneſs of *ſcripture-language*; not *intermixt* with human errors and inventions, not wire-drawn or *ſublimated* to ſuit the conceited flights of viſionaries, not *intangled* with matters of *doubtful*, oft interminable *diſputation*; concerning which our *bible* hath no where explicitly *decided*, which will *corrupt* their *minds from the ſimplici-*

* 1 Pet ii. 2. † 2 Tim. i. 13. ‡ 1 Cor. ii. 13.

ty

ty that is in Chriſt, and always tend to *impede*, but never to *promote* the progreſs of that unlimited *love*, which is the aggregate of all. In a word, if we would convey into the minds of our hearers, the ſolid dictates of *divine wiſdom*, not the unſubſtantial viſions of *human phantaſy*, ſo aptly term'd by the apoſtle, *vain deceit*; our doctrine muſt not be got at *ſecond-hand*, leſt *polluted* by the ciſtern, but from the *fountain* itſelf ever limpid and incontaminable, not *after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world*, ſupported perhaps by a *ſpecious*, or rather *puzzling*, tho' *falſe philoſophy*, but ſolely *after Chriſt*. Nor muſt people be made think, that their *religion* was given them, either as a *play* of *paradoxes*, or as a kind of *fencing exerciſe*, to gratify an itch of wrangling, which will infallibly *divert* their view from its true intention. * *Of this* intention, we are injoined to *put them* always *in remembrance*; and to *charge them before the Lord, that they ſtrive not about words to no profit*, which tend only *to the ſubverſion of the hearers*. We ourſelves therefore cannot be enough *cautious* of leading an audience unneceſſarily into the thorny ways of *controverſy*, of ringing in their ears the diſſonant din of *theologic* war, cramp terms, technical phraſes, unfathomable cavils; or of bewildring them in a *labyrinth* of knotty *doubts*, perplexing *difficulties*, contradictious *comments*. *Such teaching*, to adopt an image of the † poet yields "no "light, but rather darkneſs viſible;" far from irradiating, it *clouds* the underſtanding, far from elucidating an obſcure ſubject, it *darkens* the plaineſt and

* 2 Tim. ii. 14. † Milton.

the

the cleareſt truths; like a *fire* choked up with fewel, which emits neither light nor heat, but *ſmoke* only, inceſſantly and in great abundance; by which the ſight of byſtanders is *confounded*, and every thing around promiſcuouſly involved in *ſhade*. To every *chriſtian teacher* on the contrary, that high *encomium* given by our Saviour to *John the baptiſt*, ſhould in ſome degree belong, ‡ *a burning and a ſhining light*, which both clearly ſhows men *how* to act, and tranſfuſeth ſuch a *vital* warmth, as ſtrengthens them for action.

THE more effectually to attain this character, and evite all danger of *obſcurity*, a *fault* which of all others is the moſt diametrically oppoſite to *light*, we muſt be careful, not only that our doctrine be itſelf *untainted*, but that it be delivered in ſuch a *proper* and *familiar ſtile*, as is beſt adapted to the *ſubject*, and to the *capacity* of the hearers, as is fitteſt for reaching the end of *edifying*; cautiouſly avoiding both *extremes*, either of *creeping*, of deſcending, or rather ſinking into a groveling diction, ſo as to rebute thoſe of better taſte, or of *ſoaring* above the apprehenſion of the loweſt.

BUT farther, we muſt not only in teaching ſtudy *purity* of doctrine, *perſpicuity* and *propriety* of ſtile, but ſuch a *regularity* in our method of unfolding the ſeveral conſtituent parts of our religion, as will in due time exhibit an *exact* and *comprehenſive* view of it, and that both in the *doctrinal* and the *preceptive* part; for theſe are cloſely connected together, the former being

‡ John v. 35.

corroborative

corroborative of the latter, the latter *perfective* of the former. As the doctrine of the goſpel is the *food* of our ſouls, by means of which rightly received and digeſted, *we grow up*, * as the apoſtle ſpeaks, *to perfect men* in a ſpiritual ſenſe, *to the full meaſure of the ſtature of Chriſt*, ſo a miniſter muſt *publiſh* to his people *the whole counſel of God*, *withhold* from them *nothing that is profitable*, but give them a *ſuccinct recital* of all the parts of the illuſtrious *ſcheme* of our redemption in their natural connection and dependency; thus *rightly dividing the word of truth*.

ADD to this, that the invariable *aim* he ought uniformly to have in eye, is the *reformation* of the hearers in heart and life. In ſuch a manner he muſt always teach, as to make them ſenſible, that it is not the bare *aſſent* of the underſtanding to thoſe important verities he expounds, that will conduce to their *ſalvation* (than which I know not a more *dangerous* error that chriſtians can entertain; other errors ſtrike at the *branches* of religion, this at the *root*; others weaken or cut off ſome particular *motives*, this deſtroys the *aim* of all) that on the contrary, this *aſſent* can only be *available*, in as far as it operates a *change* upon the *diſpoſition*; that if it have not this effect, it will but *inhance* their guilt, and *aggravate* their condemnation. In this therefore all his *teaching* ought to *center*; to this every part of his miniſtration without exception ought ſteadily to *point*. Otherwiſe he is to his people but as *a ſounding braſs and a tinkling cymbal*. And in order to this, he muſt repreſent and employ the dif-

* Eph. iv. 13.

ferent

ferent *tenets* of chriſtianity, as ſo many *topics* of argument, which in ſtrict propriety they certainly are. By theſe he muſt addreſs the *hopes*, and *fears*, and all the other *affections* of the mind, that ſo he may *prevail* upon the ſinners of every denomination, and at the ſame time *confirm* and *edify* the ſaints. This I conceive is the natural *uſe* of our religious *tenets*, whence it is that the *goſpel* is term'd a * *doctrine according to godlineſs*, and *a* ‡ *moſt holy faith*, its every *principle* being a diſtinct *incitement* to a good life. Hence alſo it is fitly characterized *ſound doctrine*, ‖ wholeſome inſtruction, not (as the expreſſion is vulgarly perverted by moderns) a preciſe *conformity* to all the little captious *particularities* of a ſect, a ſcrupulous attachment in *phraſeology* and *opinion* to the *minutiæ* of a party; than which 'tis impoſſible to conceive any thing more remote from its *original* ſignification. A *term* which evidently marks, not the *logical juſtneſs* of a theory, but its *uſefulneſs* or beneficial tendency: 'tis not the *truth* of any notion which can denominate it *ſound*, but ſolely the *ſalutary influence* it hath upon human life and conduct. Whatever is *devoid* of ſuch influence, *true* or *falſe*, is hollow and *unſound*, a barren inſignificant phantom: whatever hath an *oppoſite* influence, and tends to *ſubvert* the foundations of *virtue*, is more properly term'd *poiſonous*. Thus *ſound doctrine* is by the great apoſtle, at one time *contradiſtinguiſh'd* † from every ſpecies of *vice*, *immorality* and *profaneneſs*, at another, from ‖‖ traditionary ** *fables*, unavailing

* 1 Tim. vi 3. ‡ Jude 20. ‖ ὑγιαινούσα διδασκαλία.
† 1 Tim. i. 9, 10. Tit. xi. 1. &c. ‖‖ 2 Tim. iv. 3, 4.
** The Greek word does not neceſſarily imply falſhood, as the Engliſh word commonly does. ſpecula-

ſpeculations, which by drawing off the minds of men from what alone is their grand concern, ſerve only to flatter *their luſts*, and tickle *itching ears*; but are of no efficacy in improving the heart, and amending the manners. The truths of the goſpel, on the contrary, are admirably calculated, by expelling *vice* the harbinger of *diſeaſe* and *death*, itſelf the moſt peſtilent of diſtempers, and by inſtilling *virtue*, to promote the *health* of the ſoul. Here we have both *food* for the healthful, and *medicine* for the ſick. By theſe therefore muſt the faithful ſervant of Chriſt *beſeech*, by theſe muſt he *plead*, by theſe muſt he *argue* with the various claſſes of his hearers, to *be reconcil'd to God*, and live in a regular ſubjection to his law. Doth he handle the doctrine of the *propitiation?*———Hence he perſuades his hearers, that no *ſenſe* of former tranſgreſſions, however enormous, no *dread* of the inflexible juſtice of the deity, however terrible, ſhould *diſcourage* an immediate return to the practice of their duty;———for that Jeſus hath purchaſed * *the remiſſion of ſins that are paſt*, ſins repented of and forſaken; that by his mediation God is reconcileable to every true repentant, tho' formerly the chief of ſinners. Doth he treat of the ſanctifying *influences* of the *holy ſpirit?*———Hence he evinces, that none ought to be *diſheartened* from a ſpeedy compliance with the terms of the goſpel, by an apprehenſion of *difficulty*, a conviction of the power of *habit*, an experience of the *feebleneſs* of reſolution;——for that theſe divine aids are freely tender'd to ‡ *help their infirmi-*

* Rom iii 25. ‡ Rom. viii. 26.

ties, to ſupply their deficiencies; that they have the promiſe of God, *who cannot lye*, that * if they will ſincerely *ask* this gracious aſſiſtance, they *ſhall receive* it; if they *ſeek*, they *ſhall find*: if they *knock* they *ſhall obtain entrance*. Time would fail us to point out, how in thoſe grand tenets that relate to *the world to come*, the *reſurrection*, the *judgment*, *heaven*, *hell* and *eternity*, he hath a rich, an inexhauſtible *fund* of argument, whereby as need requires, to excite their *hope*, to alarm their *fear*, to rouze their *ambition*, to court I may ſay their *ſelf-love*, and even woo their *thirſt of pleaſure* itſelf, and thus in the moſt effectual manner to adapt himſelf to people of every complexion, and all to engage them to the ſervice of their maker. And really as this is the *great end* of the whole *chriſtian* œconomy, namely to *recover* mankind from that univerſal depravation into which their apoſtacy had plunged them, to *refit* in them the *divine image*, ſo miſerably defaced by ſin, and thus by *repairing* the ruins of the *fall*, to prepare them for that immortality, they had therein forfeited, which Jeſus Chriſt hath recovered and offers in the goſpel; ſo the whole of his public *teaching*, whether he *illuſtrates* the principles of religion, whether he *explains* and *inforceth* its precepts, muſt be directed to promote this *reformation*, this univerſal *love*, this *charity*, ¶ which is *the fulfilling of the law*, which is † *the bond of perfectneſs*, which ‖ *alone abideth always*, to which *faith*, and *hope* theſe temporary graces are inſtrumental and ſubſervient; which is the ſum and drift ‡ both *of the law and the*

* Mat vii. 7, 8. ¶ Rom. xiii. 10. † Col. iii. 14.
‖ 1 Co.. xiii. 8, 13. ‡ Mat. xxii. 37, &c.

prophets,

prophets, nay which finally and ſtill more conſpicuouſly * is *the end of the commandment*, or as the word uſed by the apoſtle ſignifies ‡ of the mandate or commiſſion, that to wit given for the promulgation of the goſpel, and ſo the ultimate ſcope of the evangelic diſpenſation; ¶ without which we have nothing truly valuable, with which we have all that's requiſite.

AND now laſtly, as to the manner of delivering theſe ſacred inſtructions, we muſt not † *lord it over God's heritage*, or act as having ‖ *dominion over the faith* of others. This power (altho' ſome who bear the chriſtian name aſſume) the apoſtles themſelves diſclaimed, and with much more reaſon we: but as their *helpers*, their *prompters* in divine things, as thoſe who would compel them to believe and obey the truth, ſolely by *enlightning* their minds, and by *perſuaſion*. It is only by acting thus ingenuouſly, we can obey thoſe ſtrict commands our Saviour gave his diſciples, neither to *arrogate* to themſelves, nor to *concede* to others, a *dictatorial* domineering power, a leading or *headſhip*, I may ſay, in matters of *faith*. And as on no occaſion whatever did he utter a ſingle word in vain, ſo on this he ſeems to have been animated by a foreſight, that it would be the contrary haughty temper in ſome teachers, and implicit bigotry in the hearers, which in after-ages would tear his church to pieces, and taint his religion, both in principle and precept; ſenſible, that by the like arrogance on one ſide, and blind devotion on the other,

* 1 Tim. i. 5. ‡ παραγγελία ¶ 1 Cor. xiii. 1. &c.
† 1 Pet. v. 3. ‖ 1 Cor. i. 24.

the commandments of God under the old diſpenſation, had been forced to veil to traditional ſchemes, and rabbinical commentaries. * *Be not ye*, he enjoins them, *called Rabbi, for one is your maſter*, your guide, your leader, (‖‖ as the particular word here uſed, properly imports) *even Chriſt, and all ye are brethren. And call no man upon earth your father; for one is your father, who is in heaven. Neither be ye called maſters*, leaders, heads of parties; *for ye have only one maſter*, one head, one leader, *the Meſſiah.* Obſerve the diſintereſted conduct of the apoſtle *Paul*, who far from courting a ſuperiority of this kind, ſeverely check'd in the *Corinthian* converts a proneneſs to beſtow it. ¶ *Whilſt one ſaith, 'I am of Paul', another, 'I of Apollos', are ye not carnal? Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but miniſters, by whom ye believed?* So early in the church, appeared this bitter, this peſtiferous root of *party-ſpirit*, which ever ſince hath prov'd ſo fatal to it, by diſguiſing the truth, by poiſoning the tempers, and dividing aſunder the hearts of chriſtians, by ſcandalizing the adverſaries, and thus every way impeding the ſucceſs of the goſpel. The apoſtle foreſaw the conſequences, that this humour if not timely cruſh'd, would not only deſtroy the unity and contract the affection of chriſtians, but quickly open a door to many *ſenſeleſs and unedifying queſtions which would increaſe unto more ungodlineſs*; for the natural progeny of this prolific ſeed perpetually is contention, envy, hatred, ſpite and ſlander, a *train*, than

* Mat. xxiii, 8. &c. ‖‖ καθηγηταὶ. ¶ 1 Cor. iii. 4, 5.

which

which nothing can be more *oppoſite* to the *genius* of the goſpel, whoſe characteriſtics are peace and love; a *train*, ſo much the more formidable, that the *maſk* it wears, and *title* it aſſumes, and that when moſt ſollicitouſly and ſtrenuouſly employed in counter-working religion, is *godly zeal*. Fir'd with ſuch a horrid proſpect this faithful ſervant of *Jeſus*, grows jealous even of the honours conferred upon himſelf, and deeming they may derogate from his maſter's glory, rejects them with diſdain. * *Is Chriſt divided?* he exclaims, *Was Paul crucified for you?* or *Were ye baptized in the name of Paul?* Far from countenancing their darling diſtinctions, he ¶ brands them, tho' not founded in any difference of doctrine, with the deteſted names of *hereſies* and *ſchiſms*, that is, according to the dialect of thoſe days, unnatural *rents* and *factions*. Nay ‡ he thanks God, he had not been permitted to be even an innocent occaſion of producing them. Behold, my brethren, a true, a generous *zeal* for Chriſt's *headſhip*, a moſt worthy *exemplar* for all chriſtian *teachers*. And truly wherever one acts a part contrary to this, and inſtead of *healing* diviſions, where they are, *rends* and *wounds* the body of Chriſt more and more, that thus he may ſet himſelf up to be ador'd by the multitude, *Chriſt's headſhip* may be perpetually in his *mouth*, it may become the very *ſhibboleth* of the party, but *his own headſhip* is evidently in his aim and *eye*: far from vindicating the prerogative of his maſter, his conduct is an open *uſurpation*

* 1 Cor. i. 13. ¶ 1 Cor i. 10. xi. 18, 19. The word in both places rendered *diviſions* is that which is commonly tranſlated *ſchiſms*. ‡ 1 Cor. i. 14.

of

of it; the venerable name of CHRIST is baſely proſtituted, as a *bait*, to draw in giddy, ignorant worſhippers, to the idol SELF. A *ringleader*, a *dictator* of this ſtamp, intoxicated with the fumes of popular breath, and with his own conceited eminence, whatever his opinions are, is truly a *heretic* in the apoſtolic idiom, which is in plain *Engliſh* an *aſpiring factious ſpirit*. His blinded *partizans* vainly *truſt in lying words which cannot profit*, * like thoſe infatuated *Jews* of old, ſo ſeverely reprimanded by the prophets, the eſſence of whoſe devotion conſiſted in inceſſantly clamoring, *The temple of the* LORD, *The temple of the* LORD; who oſtentatiouſly thus addreſt themſelves to others, *Stand aloof, approach us not, for we are holier than ye.* Concerning ſuch audacious pretenders, God informs us by the prophet *Iſaiah*, ‡ *they were a ſmoke in his noſtrils, which made his anger burn continually.* 'Tis indeed no difficult matter to inflame the populace, if a man is wicked enough to intend it. The *envy* of men is ſtrangely gratified, their *vanity* tickled, their *vices* ſooth'd, their *conſciences* lull'd, their *ſecurity* rooted, by the confeſſion of other people's ſins. Noiſe therefore and big words, a phariſaical air of ſuperior ſanctity, with a profuſe mixture of defamation, eſpecially when poinſted againſt thoſe veſted with authority, will do the buſineſs. And once the paſſions are kindled, and no judgment to direct them, they are no better than blind precipitant furies. *Such* a teacher, brethren (and ſuch there undeniably *have been* in the church, *ſuch* a teacher) can we denomin-

* Jer. vii 48. ‡ Iſa. lxv. 5.

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ate a *light*? Not ſurely like the luminous *orbs* of heaven, conſtant and ſerene, whoſe uniform ſplendor *cheriſhes*, *enlivens*, *invigorates* the ſoul, and clearly *indicates* the way: liker indeed the flaſhing of a *meteor*, which *dazzles* and *pains* the organ with its glare, *confounds* the appearance of all external objects, and may make a man *ſtumble*, but will never ſhow him how to *walk*: liker an *ignis fatuus*, which *ſeduces* the traveller from his road, and *lands* him in the mire.

BUT enough on *public teaching*, being all we propoſed to offer from that part of the text, *Ye are the light of the world.*

WE ſhall now, as briefly as poſſible, conſider the import of that other clauſe, *Ye are the ſalt of the earth*; which, as was obſerved already, principally alludes to the *life* and *example* of the miniſter. In this reſpect, he is not only under the *ſame* obligations with other chriſtians, from the intereſt he hath in it himſelf, but is under a *farther* engagement from the *influence* which his conduct muſt have upon *others*. This is plainly implied in the metaphor uſed in my text, and neceſſarily reſults from the charge allotted him, of overſeeing and directing the lives of other chriſtians. * *A biſhop*, ſays *Paul* to *Timothy*, *muſt be blameleſs*: a propoſition ſtill more forcible in the apoſtle's own language, as it conveys in it an argument to ſupport it. An overſeer, (for ſo the word literally ſignifies, and is ‡ ſometimes tranſlated) an inſpector into the conduct of others, had ſurely need to be unexceptionable as

* 1 Tim. iii, 2. ‡ Acts xx. 28.

to

to his own. And indeed, if the caſe be otherwiſe, his miniſtry muſt of courſe become, if not hurtful, at leaſt, *deſpicable* among his people, and *unſucceſsful*; his doctrine will be *neglected*; if heard at all, heard with *indifference*; his advice and exhortations will be *vilified*; his conſolations will prove *inſipid*; the edge of his reproofs will be *blunted*; his perſon will be *contemned*. For, as you have it in the context, *if the ſalt*, wherewith other things are ſeaſoned, *hath loſt its ſavour, wherewith ſhall it* itſelf *be ſalted? It is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be caſt out, and trodden under foot of men.*

BUT on the other hand, how invincible the attraction, how efficacious the influence of *right deportment!* How juſt the common proverb, that 'example goes farther than precept?' It both more clearly *illuſtrates*, and more powerfully *enforces* the duties of life, than the other can effectuate.

I SAY, it more clearly *teaches* and *illuſtrates* them. Accordingly our Saviour ſeems, in the words we have read to you, to conſider a *good life* as the moſt effectual *teaching*. *Let your light ſo ſhine before men, that they, ſeeing your good works, may glorify your father who is in heaven.* This is *preaching*, not indeed to the *ear*, but to the *eye*, the brighteſt and the nobleſt of our ſenſes. Precepts and *oral inſtructions* are a ſort of *abſtract leſſons*, which the generality are hardly capable of applying to the multifarious circumſtantiated caſes, wherein human creatures may be ſituated; they are ſomewhat like *ſpiritual ſubſtances*, which not being the objects of *ſenſe*, are with difficulty comprehended by the *mind*: whereas a truly chriſtian demeanour preſents

preſents the other in all the diverſified circumſtances of *life*. 'Tis, if I may uſe a bold expreſſion, the ſyſtem of *chriſtian precepts* in an *embodied* ſtate, made the ſubject of our *ſenſes*. 'Tis really in effect, that * lovely form which *Socrates* ſo ardently deſired to ſee, VIRTUE INCARNATE, or clothed with a human ſhape. *Verbal teaching*, tho' ever ſo good, falls as far ſhort of good *example*, even for conveying juſt ideas of duty, as a fine *deſcription* of a man's perſon, to thoſe who have never ſeen him, would fall ſhort of a maſterly *portrait* or *ſtatue* of him, or as an elegant *account* of the figure, ſituation and fortifications of a town, would of an accurate *map* or *model* of it, or even as far as ſuch *portrait* or *map* would fall ſhort of *ocular obſervation*.

BUT I further inſiſt, that it not only *communicates* juſter notions, but alſo more ſtrongly inforces and *perſuades*, than any abſtract inducements whatſoever. People are apt to ſuſpect a certain *refinement* in the *precepts* of religion, which ſets them beyond the reach of meer mortals, *example* on the contrary ſhows them *practicable*. In *preaching*, the motives ye urge, operate upon their hearts, by means of the *underſtanding*; you firſt work upon their *opinions* and belief, and by the intervention of theſe, upon the affections and will: In *practice*, the ſame motives work upon them by the interpoſition of *ſight* and *experience*, which are acknowledged to have a *ſtronger* efficacy than opinion and belief. If to *avoid* ſome imminent danger, or *attain* ſome valuable end, I muſt climb a ſteep and

* Plat. Phædrus.

craggy mountain of tremendous aſpect, whoſe ſummit to appearance is inacceſſible; or muſt purſue my way thro' ſome lone and dreary deſart; do but indicate to me the *print*, the *veſtige* of a human foot, or rather point out others, engag'd in the ſame arduous enterprize before me; and I'll ſooner be prevail'd on to attempt it, than by ten thouſand arguments. Nay ſo irreſiſtible is the charm of virtuous example, that as degenerate as the world is, it attracts *love* and veneration every where. This tribute it hath often extorted, tho' given with ſome reluctance, even from its open enemies, the wickedeſt of mankind. And as *virtue* commands *love*, love as naturally produceth *imitation*, and thus inſenſibly *aſſimilates* the perſon loving to the object loved.

I WOULD only, my brethren, farther urge on this topic, that beſides the influence of *example* by *itſelf*, it adds *nerves* and *energy* to public teaching. Whatever a preacher of exemplary life advanceth, comes with double, *treble* advantage from his mouth, as his *doctrine* and *practice* correſpond. Inconceivable is the *aſcendant* which this ſingle circumſtance gives the teacher over the minds of the hearers. They *believe* the ſooner, they are *mov'd* the ſooner; as they are perſuaded the ſpeaker is *ſincere*, that he is in earneſt, believes *himſelf* what he ſays, is anxious about their well-being, and actuated by a hearty deſire to promote it. Whereas without ſuch correſpondence, preaching vaniſhes into form. The frozen auditory is proof againſt the ſtrongeſt motives. They have one unanſwerable reply to all. 'He himſelf doth 'not believe a word of it; but 'tis his trade to

'preach

'preach it; 'tis his livelihood.' So true it is, my brethren, that *biſhops* or overſeers of others, muſt be themſelves *blameleſs*.

BUT what is imply'd in this *blameleſsneſs?* Why, not only that they ſhould be poſſeſt of thoſe internal qualifications, piety towards God, reverence of his law, love to Jeſus their maſter, an ardor of promoting his cauſe, the cauſe of *pure and undefil'd religion*, benevolence to men, particularly a cordial affection, a paternal tenderneſs for their ſeveral flocks (all which it ſeems rather to preſuppoſe than imply, being before every thing neceſſary to an honeſt and conſcientious diſcharge of their duty) but moreover, ſuch a *watchfulneſs* and circumſpection over their outward demeanor, as that it may be altogether unſtain'd and irreproachable. This eſpecially our divine teacher ſeems to have intended by the expreſſion here us'd, the particular *ſavour* or *poignancy*, being that which is principally conſider'd in *ſalt*, and without which it is both *uſeleſs* and *deſpicable*. We ſhall not therefore launch out into the conſideration of all thoſe virtues which ought to adorn the miniſterial character (a ſubject far too copious for the narrow boundaries of this diſcourſe) but ſhall barely conſider, what thoſe *vices* and *failures* are which *tarniſh* and *ſtain* it moſt, or to adopt the metaphor in my text, which render this *ſalt*, naturally deſtin'd for ſeaſoning other things, and preſerving them ſound and wholeſome, itſelf *unſavory* and *unprofitable*.

AND in order to this, my brethren, it may be proper previouſly to obſerve, that in all *public ſtations*, calculated for promoting the welfare of ſociety, there

is a certain *truſt* repos'd in the *occupants*, for which any *vice* or *imperfection*, that betrays an *unfitneſs*, by counteracting the end of the office, is in them (however favourably it may be look'd upon in perſons otherwiſe ſituated) *odious* and *deteſtable*: nay even the ſhadows, the ſlighteſt *ſemblances* of thoſe particular vices or defects, altho' in others conſidered as innocent, are in them extremely *offenſive*. Now 'tis the careful *avoidance* of whatever bears the remoteſt affinity to ſuch faults, which is call'd 'obſerving the decorum of character;' a matter by no means of trivial concern, but of mighty conſequence in procuring the eſteem and love of mankind. I ſhall beg your indulgence for a little, that we may illuſtrate this by a few examples, as the ſubject well deſerves it.

THE end of the office of a *judge* is to preſerve *peace* and *order* in the common-wealth, by determining differences, and puniſhing criminals. To qualify him for this, he had need be poſſeſt of a *ſound judgment*, a thorough *knowledge of law*, and an impartial regard to *juſtice*. Accordingly ſuch *blunders* or *ignorance*, as would be overlook'd in thoſe of inferior ſtation, would infallibly expoſe him to *contempt*; and in pleas concerning property, ſuch a *partiality* to friends, benefactors and relations, as in others would be thought a very natural, and therefore, a pardonable fault, would be *hateful* in him, and highly *blameable*.

AGAIN, *cowardice* in ordinary perſons is rather termed an infirmity than a vice; and if a man makes no pretenſion to courage, his want of it will hardly be reckoned a reproach. But all the world ſees that the caſe is quite otherwiſe in a *ſoldier*, that in him the

cenſure

cenſure of ſuch a weakneſs amounts to downright *infamy*. The reaſon obviouſly is, that as the *public ſafety* is intruſted to the *fortitude* of that order, the want of this qualification, as it ſhows them *undeſerving* of ſuch a truſt, muſt render them the objects of univerſal *ſcorn* and deteſtation.

I SHALL adduce but one *inſtance* more, and that founded upon a diſtinction, not ariſing from *human* conſtitutions, but more than equivalent, as it ariſeth from *nature* itſelf. What is the reaſon, it may be aſk'd, why mankind in all ages and nations, have made ſuch an eminent difference, in ſtigmatizing the vice of *unchaſtity* in the different ſexes? In the character of the *female*, it leaves an *indelible* blot, at the ſame time that it is ſo very *ſlightly*, nay far too ſlightly cenſured in the *male*. The reaſon evidently reſults from the principle we have before laid down. In *woman* a treſpaſs againſt chaſtity betrays an *unworthineſs*, an incapacity of *truſt*, ſuch a truſt too as is of the higheſt importance, and muſt unavoidably be repos'd in that ſex by human ſociety. *Marriage* is a ſtate abſolutely neceſſary among mankind for the *education* of children, and *tranſmiſſion* of property, without which neither order nor government could ſubſiſt. Now in the married relation all the *ſecurity* the *huſband* has, that the children are *his*, that his labour and wealth are ſpent in maintaining *his own*, that his poſſeſſions ſhall deſcend to *his own* poſterity, is the *chaſtity* and fidelity of his *conſort*; it being in *her* power to *preclude* the rightful ſucceſſors, and *obtrude* upon her huſband the children of *another*. Neither of theſe are conſequent upon *his* infidelity; he can neither

ther *impoſe* his illegimate offſpring upon his wife, nor by them *cut out* from the ſucceſſion, the children of the marriage. 'Tis only *her* tranſgreſſion, that can *adulterate* the family, ſo to ſpeak, render the iſſue *ſpurious*, the right of inheritance *doubtful*, and all the ties of conſanguinity *precarious*. So ſignal a *confidence* reſts upon the *chaſtity* of the women, a virtue which if *that* ſex ſhould quit all pretenſion to, *public order* would be abſolutely *unhing'd*. And hence it happens that however *little* in this licentious age, *continence* is regarded in the *men*, ſtill 'tis and will be conſidered, even by the incontinent and effeminate themſelves, as a *cardinal* virtue in the *women*; inſomuch that *ſhe*, who hath given up all claim to it, is univerſally and juſtly accounted *worthleſs* and *abandon'd*; nay whatever in ſpeech or behaviour favours in the ſmalleſt degree of an unchaſte *immodeſt* ſentiment, is in *that* ſex, a very groſs *indecorum*.

NEITHER ought we to look upon that particular *ſeverity* of cenſure, which appears in any of the forementioned inſtances, as *capricious* and unequitable in mankind; ſince vices ſo circumſtanc'd, beſides their own intrinſic deformity, are loaded with theſe additional aggravations, *unworthineſs* of truſt, and *neglect* of reputation, a due *concern* for which, as it is the moſt vigilant *guardian* of virtue, ſo the *want* of it is the ſureſt *criterion* of total *depravity* of mind. And really ſo much hath common language been adapted to theſe ſentiments; that if you talk of the *virtue* of a *judge*, every body underſtands *juſtice* and unſhaken integrity in judgment; *virtue* and *valour* in the *military* are ſynonymous terms; as all the world knows

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that *a woman of virtue* is an ordinary epithet for *a chaſte* and modeſt *woman*. In a manner pretty ſimilar to this, the word *honour* alſo is us'd.

BUT to apply the *principle* we have been unravelling to the *ſubject* we are immediately concerned in; let us carefully inquire, *what* thoſe vices are, which moſt ſtrongly *oppoſe* the end of the holy *miniſtry*. Indeed at firſt ſight, one would be ready to conclude, that every vice were *equally* repugnant to this end, which manifeſtly is, to perſuade men to *depart from all iniquity*, to *deny all ungodlineſs and worldly luſts*, and to *live ſoberly, righteouſly and godly in the world*: and that therefore there could be no difference in this reſpect, but what ſprung from the *degrees* of atrocity in the vices themſelves. But tho' 'tis certain that *every* vicious practice or inclination doth *one* way or *other* combate this ſcope, yet not with *equal* ſtrength, or in the ſame *glaring* manner. Hence it ariſes that *ſome* faults in miniſters are deem'd much more indecent, more incongruous and unſuitable to the character than *others*, and are conſequently more *dangerous* and *diſtaſteful* to the people. Theſe we ſhall claſs under the four following particulars, *intemperance*, *impiety*, *levity*, and what is ſtrictly call'd *giving offence*.

As to the *firſt* of theſe, it may afford matter of aſtoniſhment to people of reflection, that in the *miniſterial* character, ſo great ſtreſs is by all ranks laid upon *temperance*, whilſt by I know not what retrograde refinement of modern times, it ſeems detruded from its ſeat among the *virtues*, and by ſome, who would be thought ſtandards forſooth of all polite and faſhionable

onable accompliſhments, can hardly obtain admittance into the character of a *gentleman*. In truth a moſt myſterious politeneſs, to refine and poliſh human nature by imbruting it. But paſſing that, ſo it is in reality, that whatever liberties an unthinking tribe aſſume to themſelves, however much this *diſcarded unmodiſh* virtue is by them branded with the hated epithets of *formal*, *ſtubborn*, *uncompanionable*, it is nevertheleſs univerſally acknowledged an *eſſential* requiſite in *miniſters*. Nay a *breach* of this is conſidered even by the moſt profligate, as entailing a more permanent *diſgrace* on ſuch, than many blemiſhes would do, which in any *other* perſon they would account much *more* atrocious. This matter certainly claims our ſerious attention. Upon the exacteſt ſcrutiny into the nature of vice, and its various ſpecies, we find they are almoſt all reducible to theſe *two claſſes*. They are either ſuch, as conſiſt ſolely in ſome *undue* paſſion or affection, of which the *exterior* effects are no farther regarded, than as evidences of ſuch *interior* evil diſpoſition; or they are ſuch as conſiſt in the perpetration of certain *overt-acts*, as they are called, that is certain determinate actions, which are *immediately* and *naturally* hurtful, either to the offender himſelf, or to ſociety. In this caſe the notorious *ill tendency* of the external action conſtitutes, ſo to ſpeak, the *enormity* of the crime, and indicates the *badneſs* of the diſpoſition. To the *former* claſs belong pride, vanity, covetouſneſs, envy, malice, revenge: to the *latter*, all criminal indulgence of appetite; whether *exceſſive* or *irregular*, whether inſobriety or incontinence, as drunkenneſs, fornication, adultery, inceſt;

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add to these, cursing, swearing, and those enormities, against the frequency of which, the security of human laws is requisite, robbery, murder and the like. There may be *some* vices of an *intermediate* kind, which participate of the nature of both; such are lying and calumny. Now between these two classes there is this remarkable *difference*. The *first* is susceptible of a *thousand* colours and *pretexts*, by which their *viciousness*, unless when it ariseth to an outrageous height, may be *disguised*, not only from others, but even from the person *himself* guilty of them: 'tis in the midst of these that both *hypocrisy* and *self-deceit* have, I may say, erected their *metropolis*, there being no possibility of determining with precision, where the lawful part *terminates*, and the sinful *begins*. Nay as we are told concerning the *devil*, the prince of darkness, that upon occasion, * *he transformeth himself into an angel of light*; so *these* vices, like the genuine *brood* of such a parent, often assume the *port* and denomination of the *sublimest* virtues. Thus *malice* and *detraction* are made to pass as a zealous fervour for religion and virtue, and a just indignation against vice; *pride*, — an abhorrence of every thing mean, or unbecoming one's rank and character; *ambition* is call'd patriotism and magnanimity; *avarice*——— the provident care of a family; and so of the rest. Whereas in the *second* class of vices; once the actions themselves are *detected*, there is no *evasion* for the guilt, however the crime in certain circumstances may be *extenuated*, it never can be *palliated* or excused; besides that it is recog-

* 2 Cor. xi. 14.

nized by *every body* alike. Hence it proceeds that in crimes which are the *leaſt* enormous of the *laſt* mentioned claſs, there is a *more palpable* incongruity to the character of a public *cenſor*, a *teacher* of univerſal righteouſneſs, than in the *moſt* heinous of the *firſt*. In *theſe* charity demands a favourable conſtruction where poſſible; and even where one cannot help being convinced of a man's faultineſs, there is ſtill ſome allowance for *ſelf-deceit*, which hinders him from perceiving it himſelf: whereas the diſcovery that one of this profeſſion hath, for example, committed a *debauch*, is like the detection of a centinel in the deſertion of his poſt. In *either* caſe the criminal is *ſilenced*; nor can *the one* be more conſcious of his fault, or of the *repugnancy* betwixt his conduct and his ſtation, than *the other*. This therefore muſt, in the eye of the world, appear a more *ſhameful* and *flagrant* betraying of truſt (the felon being *ſelf-condemned*, and his conduct *indefenſible*) than even thoſe vices which are of a more *malignant* nature, and more *prejudicial* to mankind; but which, at the ſame time, are of ſuch *dubious* indefinite eviction, that it is impoſſible, to every body's ſatisfaction to *aſcertain* them, or even *diſtinguiſh* them from thoſe virtues, whoſe appearance they aſſume; and where 'tis withal preſumable that a man impoſeth upon himſelf, and is not ſenſible he hath done amiſs. In fine, faults of the one kind are but *infer'd*, of the other *perceiv'd*; the firſt fall only under the cognizance of the more *intelligent*, the laſt come within the obſervation even of the *ſtupideſt*; the former admit of many *ſubterfuges*, the latter of *none*; in thoſe a man may be *ſelf-deceived*, in theſe he

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is *self-convicted*. Hence the egregious difference which the world makes between them. Hence alſo it proceeds that ſins of the *latter* claſs, divines have commonly diſtinguiſhed by the epithet *preſumptuous*.

Now as to the faults of converſation which ſhock the decorum of the miniſterial character, the moſt obſervable are whatever offends againſt *piety*, and whatever betrays an exceſſive *levity* of diſpoſition.

GOD, 'tis acknowledged is the *ſource* and *end* of religion; all the principles of it are *lights* he hath imparted to us, all originally deriv'd from divine illumination; the duties are his *laws*: he is the *ſubject* of our faith, the *object* of our obedience; in *announcing* the one, in *inforcing* the other, the *preacher* acts in a peculiar manner in quality of his ſervant, his *herald*, as the antient term properly denotes. The *magiſtrate* encourageth *virtue* (in which indeed piety is comprehended) as neceſſary for preſerving the peace, and promoting the good of the *community*, which is the ſole end of government: the *moraliſt* inculcates it as agreeable to *human nature*; as ſuitable to our internal ſentiments of right and wrong; this is as 'twere the fountain, whence all his deductions flow: the *preacher* injoins it as an obedience due to the commandments of our CREATOR; and the *moral ſenſe* or faculty, by him denominated *conſcience*, is only conſidered as one way, by which this great legiſlator hath made *intimation* of his will to man; as a tranſcript of his *law written* on our *hearts*, to uſe * the emphatic phraſe of the apoſtle. On the contrary, *vice* is reſtrained and

* Rom. ii. 15.

chaſtiſed by the *magiſtrate*, as *ſubverſive* of the quiet, ſafety and intereſt of the *political* body: by the *moraliſt* it is decry'd and pictured as a *violence* done to *nature*, or a direct oppoſition to that inward faculty, which by right is the dominant principle in the ſoul: by the *preacher* it is inveigh'd againſt as *ſin*, that is a tranſgreſſion of the divine law, of which law the ſtings of remorſe, and all the natural evil conſequences of vice are by him repreſented as in part the *ſanction*. And as thus every thing is viewed by religion in the peculiar relation it bears immediately to God, whatever ſhows *irreverence* towards the deity, is levelled againſt the *whole* of it. Other ſins are an infringement of certain *branches* of duty; but impiety aims directly at the object, the ſource and end of all. Other ſins, my brethren, are ſo many attacks upon the different *parts* of the ſtructure; but impiety ſaps the foundation, and undermines the *whole*. Other ſins, as they ſhow a contempt, or at leaſt a want of due regard for the law of God, do indeed *obliquely* and indirectly *ſtrike* at the divine authority, in the ſame manner as *felony* or even any leſſer tranſgreſſion in a common-wealth, may be ſaid to aſſail the ſtate itſelf, of whoſe laws it is a violation; but *impiety* is in the realm of God the crime of *leſe-majeſty*, an open and direct inſult upon the ſupreme power. Hence it clearly follows, that of all vices this muſt be the moſt *ſhocking*, as indeed it is the moſt *monſtrous* in a miniſter of religion, whoſe *expreſs* charge it is, to inforce every other virtue from *the love* and *fear of God*. Such abomination therefore might in him be juſtly branded with all the ignominy that appears in *parricide*, or the

moſt

moſt accurſed and contranatural attempt of a child againſt his parent, the *high-treaſon* of a ſubject, nay and a domeſtic too againſt his ſovereign, the *perfidy* of a ſervant againſt his maſter, the *treachery* of a ſoldier who betrays his commander to the enemy, or in one word, whatever among men is conſidered as the object of *horror* and *execration*. Now under this ſpecies of vice we muſt include not only thoſe *groſſer* profanations, which are hardly to be found, but among the dregs of mankind, and which without apparent neceſſity ought never ſo much as to be nam'd, but even thoſe more common faults of making light of things ſacred by *burleſk* alluſions, *contemptuous* applications, *ill-tim'd* and *ill-plac'd* jokes; in a word, all *profane jeſting* whatſoever; nor ſhould we altogether omit mentioning on this head, the neglect of religious *ordinances*, or of the *exerciſes* of devotion public or private.

A-KIN to this, but far from being ſo atrocious, is ſuch a *levity* of behaviour, as ſavours of an habitual thoughtleſsneſs and unconcern of mind, a thing exceedingly repugnant to the *grave* temper of religion. Had not *immortality* as yet been *brought to light*, we might peradventure have been ready to conclude, that this tranſient and precarious life was not of ſufficient value to repay the pains, which a vigilant circumſpection over our conduct, would aſſuredly coſt us; we might perhaps (I will not ſay reaſonably) have ſaid with the ſenſualiſt, * *Let us eat and drink*, let us to day carouſe and be merry, *for to-morrow we die*. But

* Iſa. xxii. 13.

now

now that the goſpel is brought upon the ſtage, the ſcene is ſhifted: this ſtate aſſumes a quite different, and indeed a much nobler aſpect. Our *life* here is no more a low, pitiful and trifling *paſtime*, but a *buſineſs* of inexpreſſible unimaginable importance; upon it depends our *bliſs* or *ruin* throughout *eternity*. No more does this earth exhibit a *field* for frolic and thoughtleſs merriment, but a *ſchool*, a *public theatre*, for the moſt ſerious and momentous exerciſes. We now appear all undergoing a *probation* for heaven and happineſs. How hazardous every falſe or careleſs ſtep! Even the *tranſiency*, the *precarioufneſs* of human life, theſe darling topics of the inconſiderate careleſs reveller, are now converted into the powerfulleſt *incentives* to aſſiduity and attention. 'Look 'well to yourſelves, take care what ye do', our religious monitor warns us, and 'tis his particular buſineſs ſo to warn us 'ye are acting for eternity; e-'very motion ye make is either towards *heaven* or to-'wards *hell*, nay the very next inſtant perhaps brings 'you to the brink of one or other; every action of 'this fleeting life of yours either advances or retards, 'promotes or oppoſes your progreſs to never-ending 'felicity, and muſt endure the ſcrutiny of the all-ſee-'ing judge.' So *grand*, ſo ſtriking is the picture of human life which he holdeth up to view. Now any ſuch puerile *volatility* of carriage, ſuch *frothineſs* of converſation in this inſtructor, as diſplays a total diſſipation of thought and vacuity of reflection, openly *belies* a declaration ſo ſolemn and ſo ſerious, and muſt of conſequence appear extremely unſuitable to his character. It will naturally occur to others, 'If *life*

'were

'were really an affair of ſuch unſpeakable moment,
'as you repreſent it; or if you yourſelf ſeriouſly be-
'liev'd it to be ſuch, is it poſſible you could make ſo
'light an account of it?' Hence you'll find it commonly obſerved of thoſe, againſt whom no other objection can be juſtly laid 'He is every way' ſay they 'an agreeable fellow, if he were not a miniſter,
'but his manner I own I cannot admire in one of
'that profeſſion.' I would not, brethren, be underſtood as reprehending chearfulneſs, urbanity, and good-humour, when accompanied with a manly behaviour and poſſeſt by one of unblameable reputation; theſe are far from being offenſive to the ſevereſt judges. On the contrary, a decent alacrity diffuſeth a kind of ſunſhine over a company, exhilarates, and gains the hearts of others, and thus doth ſervice to religion, by rendering her more amiable and attractive. * "*Let your converſation always be with grace*, ſays the apoſtle, ſpirited, inviting pleaſant to the hearers, but at the ſame time *ſeaſoned with ſalt*, not impertinent, inſipid, uninſtructive. Any thing indeed moroſe or ſullen in one's deportment, any thing like hypocritical ſourneſs can only foſter ſuperſtitious notions among the lower ſort, and give religion an ungainly forbidding aſpect to the more judicious. But as gravity differs widely from affected auſterity or moroſeneſs, ſo a chearful ſerenity of addreſs can never be miſtaken by any for the intemperate ludicrous ſallies of juvenile foolery. I might add that to the idea we have been unfolding of the moment, dignity and end of the ſacred office,

* Col iv. 6.

'tis

'tis likewiſe owing, that miniſters have always been more circumſcribed than others, by the ſentiments of the world, in reſpect of dreſs, recreation, company; and often what is not in the leaſt excepted againſt in others, is univerſally deem'd miſbecoming and incongruous in them. This judgment, from what hath been already ſaid, appears to have ſome foundation not in prejudice, but in nature, and therefore ought not to be altogether deſpis'd. If we ſincerely purſue the good of mankind, we will ſtudiouſly avoid whatever may any how obſtruct our progreſs, by detracting from the weight of our *doctrine*, or leſſening the influence of our *example*.

BUT this brings me to the laſt thing I propoſed to handle on this head, which, for diſtinction's ſake, we peculiarly term'd *giving offence*: a ſubject of a very nice and delicate nature; for however ſlight a treſpaſs it may appear upon a ſuperficial view, 'tis often followed by the moſt pernicious conſequences. The chriſtian law requires, and upon the moſt ſolid grounds, that we abſtain from ſuch things as are in themſelves innoxious and allowable, if judged unlawful by others, ſince they, by our acting in a different manner, might be ſtunn'd at our audacity, and thus our example and admonitions might to them be render'd unfruitful. This injunction, however, hath not eſcaped being controverted, and cenſured as unreaſonable, impoſing a burdenſome and unneceſſary ſelfdenial, tending to nouriſh prejudices, and foſter ſuperſtition among the people. But that this charge is far from being well-grounded, will appear, I perſuade myſelf, upon the moſt curſory review. A moderate ſhare of

expe-

experience may convince us, that it is not a violent oppoſition to popular errors, which is the way to *remove* them; that this on the contrary proves often the ſureſt way to *rivet* them. 'In order effectually to ex-'tirpate ſuperſtitious notions, the people muſt be 'managed,' ſays an ingenious divine, 'as infants with 'their rattles; theſe if ye attempt to wreſt out of 'their hands, they'll cry and gripe the harder; if you 'never mind them, they'll ſoon forget them, and 'drop them of their own accord.' Whereas the bare *abſtaining* from any gratification, can never be made to imply, that one deems it ſinful, and ſo cannot be conſtrued an *approbation* of any popular miſtake. But let us ſuſpend our judgment for a moment, and hear the apoſtle *Paul*'s opinion, which I'm hopeful to every impartial mind will appear deciſive, * *I know, and am perſuaded*, ſays he, *by the Lord Jeſus, that nothing is unclean of itſelf:* that ‡ *meat commendeth us not to God*; that *neither if we eat, are we the better; nor if we forbear, are we the worſe.* Such things then are quite *indifferent* in themſelves, when abſtracted from the opinions of mankind; but once theſe come into conſideration, the caſe is totally altered; what before was *harmleſs*, becomes inſtantly *pernicious.* ‖ *Nevertheleſs if thy brother be grieved with thy meat, now walkeſt thou not charitably: deſtroy not him with thy meat, for whom Chriſt died.* And for himſelf ¶ *If meat make my brother offend, I will eat no fleſh, whilſt the world ſtandeth, leſt I make my brother*

* Rom. xiv. 14. ‡ 1 Cor. viii. 8.
‖ ——— 15. ¶ ——— 13.

offend. Nothing can be more explicit than theſe words, wherein at the ſame time is conveyed the *reaſon* of the precept. Acting otherwiſe, he tells us, oppoſeth charity. *Now walkeſt thou not charitably.* By your example you either imbolden your brother to do what is contrary to his conſcience, and therefore ſinful in him, or you make him look upon you as profane and impious, and thus mar that union which ought to ſubſiſt among chriſtians, and render your conduct unedifying to him, tho' in other reſpects exemplary. You do what you can to *deſtroy*, to ruin your brother. To *abſtain* in ſuch caſes is therefore a duty unqueſtionably incumbent upon every chriſtian, if *charity* itſelf be ſo. But that there is reſulting from their *ſtation*, a *peculiar* obligation on the teachers of religion, to the obſervance of this command, will appear from conſidering, what thoſe *means* are, by which the end of their office is attained. For if their conduct in any reſpect run *counter* to thoſe means, and impede or oppoſe their operation, they violate the ſpecial engagements of their office, and hurt that *decorum* of character, which 'tis ſo neceſſary ſacredly to maintain, in order to be uſeful and regarded. The *judge*, my brethren, gets his ſentences executed by thoſe *officers* which the legiſlature hath ſubjected to him; the *ſoldier* defends his country by his *ſword*. Theſe means rightly us'd, produce their reſpective ends, independently of the *opinions* of mankind. But *here* the caſe is far *otherwiſe*. The *end* of the miniſtry is the *reformation* of men, the *means perſuaſion*, which hath an immediate and manifeſt dependence upon *opinion*. The antient rhetoricians have unanimouſly agreed

greed in this, and laid it down in their inſtitutes as an inviolable maxim, that 'an *orator* muſt be a *good* 'man.' This, they juſtly obſerve, is the only ſure effectual way to his being thought ſo, and his being thought ſo, is of wondrous efficacy in perſuaſion, nay indiſpenſibly neceſſary to it. If this holds in general, how invariably muſt it hold, when *that* to which 'tis the orator's *profeſt* buſineſs to perſuade men, is *goodneſs* itſelf. And this is preciſely the caſe with the *chriſtian orator*, the miniſter of the goſpel. Here then it muſt be in the higheſt degree requiſite, that they believe him a *good* man, in order to their giving him an *attentive* and favourable hearing, in order to their entering with facility, with ſympathy and benevolence into the ſentiments he inforceth. For if on the contrary, the hearers are deeply impreſt with an unfavourable opinion of the ſpeaker, inſtead of finding in his audience thoſe *auxiliary* forces (if I may uſe that expreſſion) *attention*, *good-liking*, *docility*, he will diſcover thoſe redoubted *enemies* he muſt encounter, *prejudice*, *coldneſs*, *antipathy*, *inattention*, *impatience*, often ſingly ſufficient to break to pieces the ſtrongeſt artillery, to extinguiſh the moſt vehement fires of eloquence, when leagu'd together, how impregnable their force! how terrible! To attain the end of the office therefore, 'tis neceſſary that the preacher ſhould do nothing, which may weaken their good opinion of him, as upon this ſo exceeding much depends. And if ſo, 'tis evident, that he muſt abſtain not only from what is *really*, but alſo from whatever is *apparently* bad, from whatſoever is by them *thought* bad, ſince acting otherwiſe as effectually deſtroys their *opinion*,

and ſo the *influence* of his teaching and example upon them, as the commiſſion of what is wrong in itſelf. So clearly upon examination, doth every ſpecies of *offence* or *ſcandal* thwart the end of our miniſtry. We cannot however conclude this article without obſerving, that a great deal muſt neceſſarily be left to prudence and diſcretion. One's behaviour ought in this above all things to appear eaſy and natural, not as proceeding from neceſſity, or fear, or favour, but from *inclination*, which hinders his ſhocking the ſentiments of others, without conſulting them. When on the contrary there appears only compliance and conſtraint, the end is uſually defeated. 'Tis further neceſſary, that we duly diſtinguiſh between a proper care in avoiding whatever may offend, and a ſervile affectation of eſpouſing and gratifying every whim and caprice, that may catch popularity: this indeed often proves a ſnare, and ſometimes hath infatuated men ſo far, that they have even ſacrificed conſcience and probity to the applauſe of a blinded rabble. They have ruſhed into *real evil*, hunting after *apparent good*, like the dog in the fable, that ſnatching at the *ſhadow* quitted the *ſubſtance*. By ſuch prepoſterous conduct, one in lieu of raiſing, lowers himſelf in the eyes of the wiſer and the more diſcerning, and frequently ſo far even in the opinion of the meaneſt, as to make them ſenſible, *they* are *maſter*, and *he* their *ſlave*. That therefore we may keep the *middle* path, and equally avoid both *extremes*, we muſt habitually attend to that excellent precept of our Lord; to join * *the prudence*

* Mat. x. 16.

of

of the ſerpent with *the innocence of the dove.* Guided by this admirable *maxim*, through all the mazy windings of this variable life, our conduct may indeed challenge the honourable epithets, *decent*, *comely*, *venerable.*

Now the ſum of what we have advanc'd concerning thoſe *vices*, which in the moſt glaring manner ſully the *miniſterial* name, and are univerſally accounted *ſcandalous*, is briefly this. The *end* of the office is *reformation.* *Intemperance* is a flagrant and beaſtly proſtitution, incompatible with the ſevere character of *reformer.*———The *ground* and reaſon of all, both of his authority and their obedience, is the *will of God. Impiety* of conſequence tears up, as it were, the whole ſyſtem of religion by the *roots.*—The *motives* us'd, ariſe from the *connection* of heaven, hell, eternity, with our preſent conduct. *Levity* baſely *diſcredits* theſe weighty and important truths.—— The *means* employed is *perſuaſion. Offence* of every kind *invalidates* the means. Thus have we ſet theſe blemiſhes in that particular light and attitude, which moſt expoſes their deformity, and in which therefore they ought chiefly to be viewed by us. It muſt be own'd however, that in *moſt* of them, there is involved a *complication* of guilt, which often ſhocks the character in *ſeveral*, ſometimes in *all* thoſe different reſpects.

Now 'tis by theſe eſpecially, that this *ſalt* loſeth its *ſaltneſs*, that peculiar reliſh, for which alone 'tis valued, and ſo becomes at once *taſteleſs*, *uſeleſs* and *contemptible.* The very *refuſe* and *corruption* of other things is good for *ſomething*; but *ſalt* when *inſipid*,

as

* as our Saviour hath told us, is good for *nothing*, 'tis *neither fit for the land, nor for the dung-hill*, 'tis *the off-ſcouring of all things*, 'tis abſolutely worthleſs and inſignificant. Thoſe of other ſtations lie under a ſtrong obligation to ſhun ſuch *vices* as are prejudicial to their character, from a natural and, when in due degree, a commendable deſire of winning the eſteem and love of mankind; but the miniſter is ſtill under a ſtronger obligation to be careful that his *character* be blameleſs, not ultimately on account of the regard it brings him, but becauſe character itſelf is *one* inſtrument and indeed a *principal* inſtrument, by which he attains the end of his miniſtrations. Others may with ſucceſs officiate independently of this, but for him it is impoſſible. 'Tis likewiſe worthy of our notice, that thoſe of other ſtations by their miſbehaviour, may bring obloquy upon themſelves, but that rarely affects *others* of the ſame employ, much leſs the *occupation* itſelf. The office of a *judge*, or that of a *ſoldier* is not accounted the leſs honourable, or the leſs uſeful, becauſe 'tis poſſible to find *judges* that are *unjuſt*, and *ſoldiers* that are arrant *cowards*; nor do their *brethren* in profeſſion, ſhare in the reproach incurr'd by a few individuals: whereas any *ſcandal* in a miniſter, is quickly by the partial world, *transfer'd* to the whole order. They are all conſider'd as accountable for it. If we offend in any thing, as the apoſtle plainly intimates, † the *miniſtry* will not eſcape without *blame*; nay what is ſtill worſe, ſuch offence brings even *religion* itſelf under ſuſpicion at leaſt, if not into contempt.

* Luke xiv. 35. † 2 Cor. vi 3,

It

It opens the mouths of adverſaries; affords a handle to thoſe, *who* only *wait for our halting*, to blaſpheme the *good ways* of the Lord, and puts to ſilence and confuſion the few ſincere, the hearty friends of virtue and true godlineſs. Thus the execrable lewdneſs and profligacy of *Eli*'s ſons, caus'd the * *offering of the Lord* to be *abhorred* by the people. Such *vices* therefore in a *miniſter*, as betray an abſolute *negligence* in point of character, or rather a *proſtitution* of it, by what name, brethren, ſhall we, can we denominate them? Whatever *mollifying* appellations a ſenſual diſſolute age may be pleas'd to *dignify* ſuch vices with in others, in *him* they will never fail to be *branded*, and that even by the ſons of riot and ſenſuality themſelves, as an infamous *deſertion* of his office; as a *ſelling* the intereſts of religion, and as much as in him lies, the ſalvation of his pariſh, for the vileſt gratifications. It is without exaggeration or hyperbole, *fighting* againſt that general, under whoſe banner he is inliſted: it is *Judas*-like, betraying his maſter into the hands of his mortal enemies. What conſtitutes the very *eſſence* of the crime in others, is in him the ſmalleſt *circumſtance* of the guilt.——Nay ſo peculiarly *tickliſh*, ſo *ſlippery* his ſituation, that one ſingle treſpaſs (and who ſo uniformly ſteady, as never to be overtaken in a fault! yet in a miniſter one ſingle treſpaſs) if of a heinous nature, commonly affects his whole character, impedes the good effects of the moſt ſhining virtues, and leaves a ſtain which he will find it difficult to expunge with his utmoſt vigi-

* 1 Sam. ii. 17.

lance,

lance, in a courſe of years. One *unjuſt* ſentence of a *judicature* hinders not the good effects of their juſt and equitable deciſions at other times. The *cowardly* behaviour of an *army* upon one occaſion, never precludes the good conſequences of their bravery and intrepidity on another. But here how widely different is the caſe! one *flagrant* and *atrocious* tranſgreſſion will *mar* the influence of an example, in other reſpects unexceptionable; it will *obſtruct* the efficacy of the moſt perſuaſive teaching, nay it will even go far to *efface* any good impreſſions, his miniſtry hath formerly produc'd. It but too often proves like * the dead fly in the apothecary's ointment, which corrupts the odour of the whole, and inſtead of fragrance cauſeth it to emit a ſtench. *A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump.*

I CANNOT conclude without obſerving, that our *caution* nevertheleſs, muſt not be limited to the vices before canvaſſed, but employed againſt every vice whatever; that every vice, the luſts of the *ſpirit*, as well as thoſe of the *fleſh*, *corrupt* affection, as well as *inordinate* appetite, do *really* combate the end of our miniſtry; and tho' ſome vices do it in a more *covert* manner, yet not the leſs *ſurely* upon that account; and tho' not ſo *opprobrious*, and ſo *unſeemly* in the eye of the multitude, yet with thoſe of deeper penetration, often more *effectual* in diſcrediting the whole order, and drawing an *odium* upon the profeſſion. Theſe vices had need to be the more ſtrictly guarded againſt, as their dark deluſive nature gives them many advan-

* Eccl. x. 1.

tages

tages in attacking, miſleading and ruining the ſouls of men. They do not, like a *fair* enemy, carry on an *open* war againſt us, elſe it behoved to be the moſt ſupine negligence in us, if at a loſs where to find them; the moſt flagitious reprobacy, if irreſolute to repulſe them. The greateſt execution they atchieve, is not by *battery*, but by *ſap* and *ambuſh*. Nay, ſo imperceptibly do they ſteal into our minds, ſo effectually diſguiſe themſelves when admitted, that we often imagine we are entertaining a *boſom-friend*, when harbouring and careſſing a *deadly foe*. And as *theſe vices* we are ſometimes prone to *canonize* in ourſelves; like a contagion, they ſpread their *baneful* influences abroad; they raiſe up crouds of votaries and imitators every where around; quickly are they *deified* by the eaſily deluded herd, and ſo become in all reſpects a public nuiſance. Thus, what *miſchief*, yea, what *butchery*, have not pride, ambition, a turbulent and perſecuting ſpirit, when gilded and ſanctified with the ſplendid titles of *faith* and *zeal*, created in the world? If other vices render the miniſtry *without effect*, theſe empower it to do *hurt*; if others render this ſalt *inſipid*, theſe infect it with a *morbific* taſte; if others expoſe the ſacred function to the *contempt* of every body, theſe ſet it up as a mark to the *hatred* of the more intelligent. With ſuch, theſe have been but too commonly, nay raſhly and injurioufly repreſented as *characteriſtical* of the order; the office itſelf hath been traduced with theſe as *conſtitutional* blemiſhes. But whatever handle the *wickedneſs* of a few, and the *madneſs* of ſeveral may have given (for that ſome *handle* hath been given, is undeniable) it were nevertheleſs eaſy to e-

vince, that there is no ſufficient ground to juſtify ſo general an accuſation. Whatever unjuſtifiable meaſures have, in this nation, been formerly purſued; whatever barbarities in other countries, have been recently, or are even to this moment perpetrated, under that moſt blaſphemous pretence of *doing God ſervice*; thanks to heaven that now-a-days in this church and kingdom, this rancorous, inveterate ſpirit of perſecution and intolerance, is almoſt, if not altogether extinct. The *weapons of the warfare* of Antichriſt, my brethren, are *carnal*; but *ours*, * ſays the apoſtle, *are ſpiritual.* May we then never betray ſuch abject *diſtruſt*, ſuch *want* of faith (as it obviouſly ſhould be called) either in the goodneſs of our cauſe, or in the ability and inclination of our almighty protector, as thoſe (whatever loud pretenſions they may make) barefac'dly and moſt inglorioufly do, who on all occaſions are for ſummoning the *arm of fleſh*, the ſecular power to their aſſiſtance; who to ſave mens ſouls would moſt inhumanly *butcher* and torment their bodies, who (as in the caſe of the *Samaritans*, ‖ the diſciples once propos'd, when ignorant of the ſpirit of the goſpel) would ſupport the cauſe of holineſs by fire and ſword, the moſt unhallowed means: ‡ unmindful of the vengeance, which for a leſs heinous crime overtook *Uzza*, when putting forth his hand to preſerve the ark of God from falling, he ſhowed a diffidence of divine protection. But we are verily perſuaded, that as the *ſpiritual weapons*, the apoſtle ſpeaks of, were alone ſufficient for the eſtabliſhment

* 2 Cor. x. 4. ‖ Luke ix. 52. &c. ‡ 1 Chro. xiii. 10.

of

of our divine religion, as by theſe ſhe hath *baffled*, nay *triumphed* over the united efforts, both of the fury and the cunning of her numerous and virulent oppoſers, as by theſe ſhe hath ſurmounted, glorioufly *ſurmounted* all the *ſophiſtry* of diſputation, all the *tyranny* of power; ſo theſe ſtill are and will be *mighty through God to the pulling down of Satan's ſtrong holds*, to the demolition of all the frantic bulwarks of impiety and error. Let us therefore ſtudy with an aſſiduous unintermitted care, to have our minds adorn'd with *clemency* and *moderation*, qualities ſo conſpicuous in the character of him, who was *the founder and the finiſher of the faith*; qualities, which are the inſeparable concomitants of *chriſtian zeal*, and which can alone diſtinguiſh this *holy fire*, ſo exactly typified by that celeſtial innocuous *flame*, * which *Moſes* diſcovered in the buſh, from the impure and waſteful *burnings*, which the delirium, blindneſs and brutality of party-rage have often kindled.

AND let us furthermore habitually remember, that the language of the world to the teachers of religion hath ever been, and to the end of time will be, *What do ye more than others?* We muſt in all things ſhow ourſelves patterns of good works. We are ſituated on an eminence, like *a city ſet on a hill, which cannot be hid*, and muſt therefore be the more careful, that the light of our chriſtian example *may ſo ſhine before men, that they ſeeing our good works, may* be attracted by them, to *glorify our father who is in heaven.* Thus ſhall we prove faithful ſhepherds of our Lord and maſter, being both *guides* and *enſamples* to his flock. Thus

* Exod. iii. 2.

ſhall we be in *effect*, what according to the primary *intent* of our office, we were diſtin'd to be, *the ſalt of the earth*, as well as *the light of the world*.

I SHALL now conclude in a few ſentences directed to the people. If, my chriſtian brethren, the *miniſterial* office is calculated for promoting, not only your *temporal*, but *eternal* happineſs, ſure the leaſt ye can do for your own ſakes, is diligently to *attend* upon it, ſedulouſly to endeavour to *improve* by it, and thus to *co-operate* with the views of your miniſters. If we diſcharge our duty faithfully, and act our part aright, our *diligence*, tho' unſucceſsful, will be approv'd and *rewarded* in the great day of recompence: your *negligence*, as in that caſe, it will be more highly aggravated, will be more ſeverely *puniſhed*. If on the contrary, we ſhould appear to have been *remiſs* in executing our office, our doom will indeed be *grievous*; but think not, that even in that caſe, your *irreligion* and impenitence will *eſcape* with impunity. * *Son of man*, ſaid God to the prophet *Ezekiel*, *I have made thee a watchman to the houſe of Iſrael; therefore hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me. When I ſay unto the wicked, Thou ſhalt ſurely die; and thou giveſt him not warning, nor ſpeakeſt to turn him from his wicked way, to ſave his life: the ſame wicked man ſhall* notwithſtanding *die in his iniquity: but his blood will I require at thine hand. Yet if thou warn the wicked, and he turn not from his wickedneſs, he ſhall die in his iniquity; but thou haſt delivered thy ſoul.* The ſer-

* Ezek. iii. 17, 18, 19.

vant

vant is treated according to his fidelity, but in any event, warn'd, or unwarn'd, they who perſiſt in wickedneſs ſhall periſh eternally. What need then hath every one to look carefully to himſelf? or, What is there in nature which can merit care, if eternity doth not?

THAT therefore ye may profit by the miniſtry of reconciliation ye enjoy, 'tis in the firſt place neceſſary that ye *attend* upon it. *Faith cometh by hearing*, * ſaith the apoſtle. Do *not* then *forſake the aſſembling of yourſelves together, as the manner of ſome is.* It is, I know not how, in theſe enlightned days (as thro' a ſpecies of ſelf-flattery we are led to call them) growing into vogue with many, to deride all *inſtituted* rites and ſacraments, and expreſs a contempt of *religion*, and of public worſhip; a contempt too, which ſeems ſtudiouſly affected, as a *criterion* of ſuperior attainments, as that which diſtinguiſheth a man of *ſpirit* and talents, not only from the rude unlettered *vulgar*, but from the graver tribe of *formaliſts* and *pedants*, who muſt ſupply the want of genius, by the antiquated aids of ſtudy and reflection. They acknowledge, ſuch will tell us, and they had need to tell us, otherwiſe we ſhould not perhaps be quick-ſighted enough to diſcern it, they acknowledge the obligations of *virtue* and morality, and 'what neceſſity is there,' ſay they 'for any thing beſides? All elſe is meer frippery and 'cant.' Did we, my brethren, build up a pompous *ritual* upon the ruins of true *morals*; did we recommend the *obſervance* of ceremonies, as in any reſpect

* Rom. x. 17.

a *ſupplement* to virtue, or *atonement* for the want of it; did we aſcribe to external performances, any inſtantaneous, unacountable, and I may ſay, *magical* efficacy; did we emaſculate the minds of men with vain unutterable *panics*, and through ſuch dark avenues conduct them to the gloomy haunts of *ſuperſtition*; or on the other hand, by inebriating their ſpirits, raiſe them to an ideal *paradiſe*, the illuſory elyſium of *enthuſiaſm*;———there would then indeed be ſome *colour* for their plea. On the contrary, I will boldly aver, that as to the *ceremonial* part, in itſelf ſimple, decent, maſculine, no vain *parade* of childiſh jingle and trumpery, we both repreſent it in our doctrine, and render it in fact, in all reſpects *ſubordinate* and ſubſervient to the *moral*. This we dare challenge even our keeneſt antagoniſts to refute. Were therefore the *inſtitutions* of public worſhip and teaching to be conſidered no otherwiſe (altho' certainly they ought to be conſidered as ſomething more) than as the *means*, the inſtruments of infuſing and promoting *virtue*; theſe ſages I think, would ſhow extremely little regard to the *end*, who ridicul'd and vilified the *means*. And tho' they may fancy themſelves too *wiſe* for inſtruction (for in their *catalogue* we muſt not expect that ſuch *plebeian* virtues, as *modeſty* and *humility*, ſhould find a place) yet they ought to advert, that ſuch is the contagious influence of *example*, that thoſe of *inferior* rank, who may really need our homely leſſons, are ever ready emulouſly to imitate the conduct of their *betters*, thoſe immediately above them, eſpecially when recommended by the fanciful epithets of *modiſh* and *polite*: thus a cuſtom of this

nature

nature may at length, and if not timely prevented, undoubtedly will deſcend to the moſt unenlighten'd, to the loweſt of the people, to thoſe whom theſe fine gentlemen denominate the *mob*. And where then alas! their boaſted ſuperiority? Where that tranſcendent *merit* and ſagacity marked out by the admired names of *libertine* and *free-thinker*? Seriouſly, my brethren, I may appeal to the cool reflection of every impartial and judicious hearer, how direful the conſequences muſt be of religion's being univerſally contemn'd; which by the way is no *chimerical* ſuppoſition, but a thing at preſent foreboded by too many *ſymptoms*. For my own part, I ſhould think it no laborious undertaking to evince, were this a ſuitable occaſion, that ſuch a *neglect* of the poſitive precepts of chriſtianity, which are ſo eminently ſerviceable to the cauſe of virtue, is not more *irreligious*, than it is *impolitic* and *immoral*; that it is alike repugnant to the moſt ſacred engagements we lie under, as *chriſtians*, as *citizens*, as *men*. The generality without doubt are eaſily caught and deceived with appearances. Impudence but too commonly paſſeth on the world for *ſenſe*; loud laughter and impertinence for *wit*, and modern free-thinking, as 'tis call'd, for an uncommon reach and *penetration*: the very names of things contribute to deceive us; and 'tis for that reaſon to be regreted that the name *free-thinkers* (an honourable epithet, if rightly underſtood, to be diſclaimed, not by *freemen* and *proteſtants*, but only by the patronizers of *implicit faith*,) ſhould, by I know not what ridiculous complaiſance, be ſo univerſally applied to ſome, whoſe genius and endowments would

I conceive, be much better hit by the term *half-thinkers*, or *random-thinkers*, bold precipitate deciders upon every ſubject, without knowledge, without inquiry. But, my brethren, the apoſtle *Peter* hath exceedingly well inſtructed us, to diſtinguiſh between *appearance* and *reality*, between a *juſt* claim and an *impudent* pretenſion. As early as his days, we find *libertiniſm* and *licentiouſneſs* had impos'd on ſeveral under the notion of *freedom*. The *libertine* of *that* age (and how exactly he is copied in the *preſent*, let the candid hearer judge) declaim'd, it appears, againſt *religion* as ſlavery, its *laws* as manacles and fetters; from which he vaunted, he had happily emancipated himſelf, and *zealous* doubtleſs for the good of mankind, he ſpared no pains to make all the proſelytes he could. The *threats* of religion he defied as ſcarecrows and bugbears, fit only for frightning children. This at leaſt we are certified of, that † *GREAT SWELLING words of vanity* he ſpoke, by which many were allured and ſeduc'd to their undoing. Our apoſtle however detects his inconſiſtency, expoſes the *abſurdity* of his claim, and nobly reſcues the rever'd name of *liberty* from ſuch vile profanation. *Whilſt they promiſe them liberty*, ſays he, *they themſelves are the ſervants*, the very ſlaves *of corruption*; *for of whom a man is overcome, of the ſame is he brought into bondage*, or enſlav'd. But enough of this creature the libertine.

WE proceed further to obſerve, that tho' hearing be *neceſſary*, 'tis not *ſufficient*, 'tis not *all* that is ne-

† 2 Pet. ii. 18, 19.

ceſſary

ceſſary. You muſt *take heed how you hear*. There is a *ſort* of people ſo ſurpriſingly inconſiderate; that they ſeem to dream of nothing, beyond a bare *formal* attendance upon the ordinances of religion. Of them it was juſtly ſaid by one of the fathers, "They bring their "*ears* only to church, and leave their *hearts* at home." At leaſt this is applicable to ſome of them; for there are people now a-days, we acknowledge, a tribe utterly unknown to thoſe early ages, who cannot imagine that in churches, they have even the ſmalleſt occaſion for their *ears*. Their *eyes* are the only bodily organs they employ; theſe they regale indeed; to their rambling they give the fulleſt ſwing. Surely nothing can be leſs thought of, or propos'd by ſuch, than the *ſalvation* of their ſouls. That is an *object* it would appear, below their notice. Elſe how ſhould their conduct be ſo wofully prepoſterous? Did ever any think to be *fed* by *looking* at meat upon a table, or even by *putting* it into his mouth, and inſtantly ſpitting it out, without letting it enter his *ſtomach*? Or is it one whit wiſer to ſuppoſe, we can be ſpiritually *benefited* by what ſinks no deeper than the ear, ſuppoſing it ſhould reach ſo far? * *Not the hearers of the law*, ſays the apoſtle *Paul*, *are juſt before God: but the doers of the law ſhall be juſtified.* And 'tis the advice of another apoſtle; † *Be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own ſelves.* The language of the apoſtles, we confeſs, is only directed to ſuch, as may properly be ſaid to hear the word. For as to thoſe gayer folks, who propoſe nothing by at-

* Rom ii. 13. † Jam. i. 22.

tending places of public worſhip, but *vanity* and *diverſion*, to feed *their own* eyes and the eyes of *others*, we acknowledge them in ſincerity, without any compliment, to be a race *altogether* modern. Thoſe firſt publiſhers of our religion, ſeem never to have form'd the moſt remote conception of them.

AGAIN, there is another *kind* of people, that often make part of the auditory, who, as they think themſelves above being edified by the ſpeaker, ſit only as *critics* on the performance. 'Tis not to ſuch faſtidious auditors the preacher muſt preſume to think he is giving *inſtruction*: no indeed; he is only giving a *ſpecimen* of his talents, and undergoing a trial before his *judges*. Theſe are for ordinary no inconſiderable *claſs* in *city-congregations*, and in few cities more conſiderable than in this. A claſs too, which admits of various *ſubdiviſions*; ſome affect to be judges of *oratory*, and the decorations of language; ſome of cloſe *reaſoning* and juſt ſentiment; others, who are commonly the moſt ill-natured judges, and at the ſame time the moſt illiterate, attend only as ſpies upon *hereſy*; a conceited, ignorant generation, who underſtand not what they ſay, who know nothing of the ſubject, whereof they ſo confidently affirm. They have indeed, my brethren, a *zeal* of God, we bear them record, (as * the apoſtle did his countrymen) but 'tis not according to knowledge. They *attend* to ſermon truly, nay they gape with greedineſs, if I may ſo expreſs myſelf, but 'tis not for ſound advice and *inſtruction*, not for any thing that may mend their

* Rom. x. 2.

hearts

hearts and improve their lives (would to God, there were ſuch a *zeal* in any for theſe important *ends!*) 'tis on the contrary for whatever can afford matter of carping, whatever, by their wreſting and torturing, may be made to have an ill *ſound*, or admit a bad *conſtruction*. Such things how *eagerly* do they pick up, how *carefully* depoſite in their memories, nay often how *induſtriouſly* diſſeminate with their own improvements, through the circles of their intercourſe, as if on purpoſe to prevent any good effect of preaching either in themſelves or others. They perch upon the diſcourſes they hear, not as the *bee* upon the flowers, that from every bloſſom extracts a liquor both nouriſhing and delicious; but truly like the *waſp*, that ſucks a venomous juice from the moſt wholeſome plants. I would however earneſtly *intreat* theſe exceptious people, who the more deſerve our pity, as what hurt they do, they do *ignorantly*, not *knowing what ſpirit* they *are of*; I would intreat them, not to ſuffer themſelves to be ſo far blinded by an ill-informed and worſe-conducted zeal, as to imitate thoſe *primitive* enemies of chriſtianity, great *zealots* too, the viperous, malevolent *Phariſees*, whoſe * ſole intent in following our Saviour, was that *they might intangle him in his talk*. I would ſeriouſly *adviſe* them, if at all ſuſceptible of advice, to beware in time, leſt by their peſtilential cavils, their character ſhould at length exactly quadrate with † that given by our Lord, of thoſe his moſt *ſanguine* oppoſers; who would neither go into the kingdom of heaven themſelves; nor permit others to go, who were entring.

* Mat. xxii. 15. † Mat. xxiii. 13.

I HAVE done, when I have juſt remarked, that there is ſtill another *ſort* of hearers, not altogether unlike the former in diſpoſition, who make it their buſineſs to obſerve very minutely, what is to be found in the diſcourſe, which reproves *another's* conduct. This ſentence they diſcern (and in this ſpecies of diſcernment they are wondrouſly acute) is very applicable to *ſuch a perſon*; that again to *ſuch another*; but never all the while think, which is their only buſineſs to think, of applying any thing to *themſelves*. Whence ſo immoderately diſintereſted an anxiety for the reformation of *the world*, to the abſolute neglect of *their own*; in people too, who in other reſpects, will not be readily ſuſpected of exceeding in generoſity and benevolence. Surely a moſt miraculous pitch of *charity*, if charity be at all concern'd? But do not deceive yourſelves, I pray you, charity produceth no ſuch ſpurious pernicious fruits. This evil, I'm afraid, ſirs, will appear to have a very different *root*. It will be found to ſpring from nothing but *malice*, *envy*, and a cenſorious or *ſlandering* diſpoſition. To ſuch therefore we may juſtly ſay with the apoſtle, * *Who art thou that judgeſt the ſervant of another? To his own maſter he ſtandeth or falleth.* Art thou at the great and terrible day of the Lord *Jeſus*, to ſtand *proxy* for thy neighbour? or, Muſt *he* anſwer for himſelf, and *thou* for thyſelf? *Each* for himſelf, I ſuppoſe. Mind thou then *thy own* province, which is *thy own* reformation; and if thou look well to that, thou'lt find work enough. The ſame authority, which

* Rom. xiv. 4.

hath

hath expreſly * prohibited our *judging others*, leſt with the ſame ſeverity we ourſelves *be judged* by God, hath ſtrictly ‡ injoined us to *judge ourſelves* that *we be not judged* and *condemned with the world.*

FOR this reaſon, my fellow-chriſtians, and what I ſay to *one*, I ſay to *all* claſſes of hearers, who are deſirous to promote the ſalvation of their ſouls; hear the word with *attention*, and *ſimplicity* of heart, ſuch as becomes thoſe who ſolely and ſincerely ſeek their own edification; *record* it carefully, and *infix* it in your memories; at proper ſeaſons *ruminate* and *reflect* upon it afterwards; impartially make *application* of it to the correction and improvement of your lives. In this exert yourſelves continually. Be frequent in applying to the *throne of grace*; humbly and earneſtly implore the *aid* of God's ſpirit, that ye may be endowed with a *hearing* ear and *underſtanding* heart; that the word of God, which is the ſpiritual ſalutiferous ſeed ſown by the miniſter may be deeply *rooted* in your heart as in good and *clean* ground, free from all rank, deſtructive weeds; and that it may *bring forth* abundantly in your life, *the fruits of righteouſneſs.*

AND may the God whom we ſerve in the goſpel of his Son, graciouſly vouchſafe his countenance and bleſſing on all the endeavours us'd either by us or you, for promoting the cauſe of truth and virtue. AMEN.

* Mat. vii. 1, 2. ‡ 1 Cor. xi. 31, 32.

THE END.